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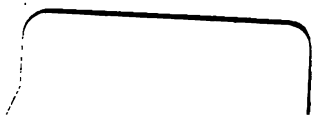
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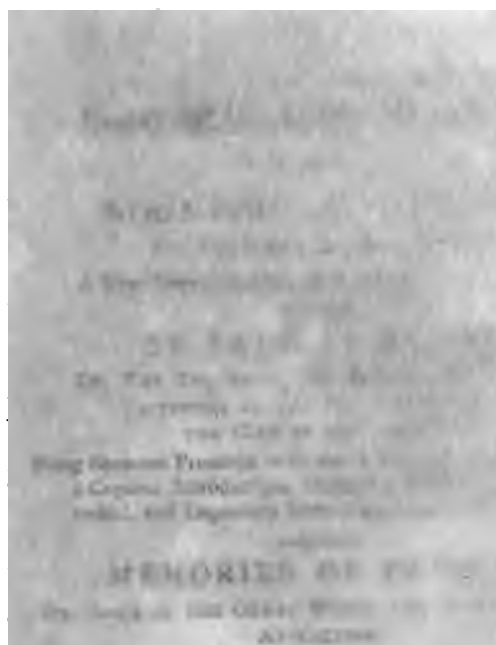
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THE
HEALING WATERS OF ISRAEL:

OR,

THE STORY OF NAAMAN THE SYRIAN.

An Old Testament Chapter in Providence and Grace.

BY

J. R. MACDUFF, D.D.

*Author of "Morning and Night Watches," "Memories of Bethany,"
"The Shepherd and His Flock," &c. &c.*

"Can you not stoop down, wash like NAAMAN, and come
out clean—come out a King?"

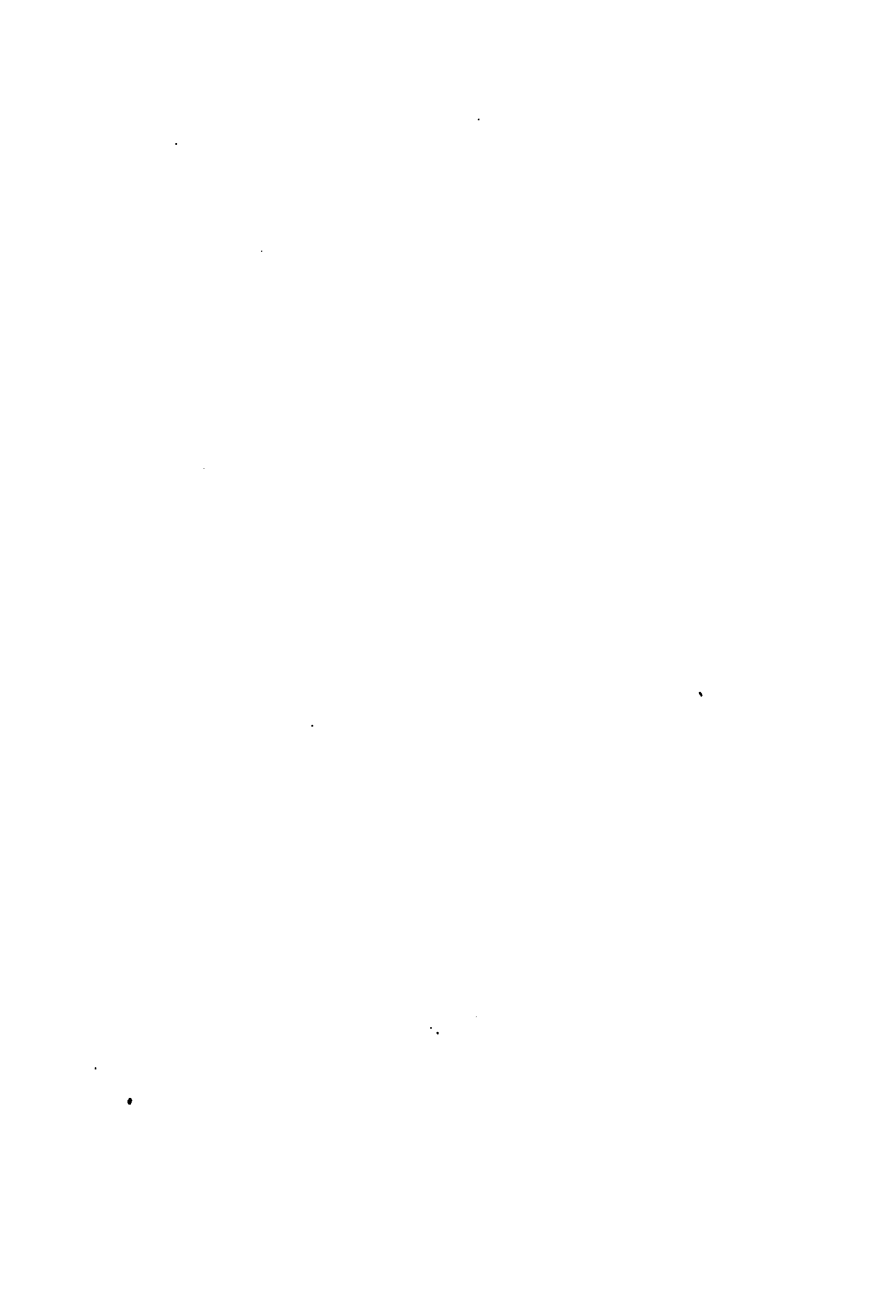
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PREFACE.

“WE scarcely know,” says a well-known Biblical expositor, in briefly commenting on this portion of the Old Testament, “any passage of Holy Writ of the same extent, which more remarkably bears out the declaration of the Apostle, that ‘*all Scripture* is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.’ The history, or rather the anecdote, of NAAMAN, is ‘profitable,’ not for one of these things separately, but for all of them.”

It is endorsing these sentiments of a master in Israel, that the author of this unambitious volume would seek for it a humble place (for it claims and is entitled to no more), among the ‘monographs’ of sacred story.

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A

I

Introductory : The Contrasted
Rivers.

"ABANA AND PHARPAR, RIVERS OF DAMASCUS . . . THE WATERS
OF ISRAEL !"—2 KINGS V. 12.

Introductory.

A FEW preliminary personal reminiscences and topographical details, may help to vivify the scenes and incidents described in the chapters that follow.

It was on an early day in April we bade farewell to the soil of Palestine, and crossed the shoulder of Hermon to the wild uplands of Anti-Lebanon. The previous evening had been spent by the magnificent rock-hewn cave at Banias—the shrine of the Roman Pan,—its ancient sculptured niches now picturesquely framed and festooned in lichen and fern. Here is the *apparent* source of the Jordan,*—the birthplace of those “Waters of Israel,” which, in their lower reaches

* “Geographically, it might perhaps be sought elsewhere; but historically, the sight of the springs which we have now reached, at once vindicates and explains their claim.”—*Sinai and Palestine*, p. 130. For a description of the Hâsbani as the most northern and principal spring of the Jordan, see *Art.* by Dr Thomson in *Bibliotheca Sacra* for February 1846. Also Van de Velde’s description of his exploration of it, vol. i. pp. 129, 130.

at all events,* provoked in the mind of the Syrian leper, as they do in that of the traveller still, the contrast with the clear rivulet, by the banks of which (at Kefr Hauwar) our tents were now pitched. The Pharpar, (called by the modern name of 'Awaj), besides its historical association with the Aramite warrior, was the only brook, in the true sense of the word, which had refreshed our eyes since we stood by the 'Ain es Sultân—"the fountain of Elisha"—on the plains of Jericho. The remembrance of it is that of a bright stream rushing over a pebbly bed, in which the red jasper stone was conspicuous ; reminding more than anything, at all events in the Holy Land, of the familiar Scottish "burn ;" its banks sprinkled with patches of white and purple, though not the same profusion of floral wealth and brilliant hues as we had left behind us on the hill-sides of Judea and Galilee.† The thought could hardly fail to

* Not certainly at their source, which is singularly pure.

† 'Awaj, in Arabic, means "the tortuous" or "crooked." *Pharpar*, in Hebrew, means "the fugitive." Those who have explored its source describe it as taking its rise at the base of the central peak of Hermon, and descending thence through a wild ravine.—See *Porter's "Syria and Palestine,"* vol. ii. p. 450.

suggest itself, that Naaman and his cavalcade had in all likelihood gazed on the same spot as they travelled by the old traffic route from Damascus,—for the road across Great Hermon was then, as now, the gateway by which armies and caravans passed to and from Egypt and Palestine. He may have carried with him to the Prophet's dwelling at Gilgal (of which we shall afterwards speak) the recent memory of this "brook by the way," at the side of which his servants and horses probably refreshed themselves on the first stage of their journey.*

Pleasing, however, as the stream of the supposed Pharpar is,† no wonder that the valiant Syrian gives it only the second place in his partial estimate of his native rivers.

Leaving our encampment at early morn, the glories of Damascus in its midday splendour,

* An earlier pilgrim, it may be surmised, must have crossed the 'Awaj—viz., Jacob, on his memorable journey south from the home of "Laban the Syrian" (Gen. xxxi.)

† There are other neighbouring streams which have been made to share the claim to the original Pharpar, but the most reliable investigators are in favour of the 'Awaj. The subject has been fully discussed by Drs Robinson, Thomson, Porter and Tristram.

under a palpitating air and a sky of intensest blue, gradually disclosed themselves,—the white lines of houses, with marble mosques and tapering minarets, “like a city built of pearls,” rising amid a profusion of foliage rivalling the golden mazes of the pagan Hesperides. Whence this marvellous luxuriance, which may be averred without exaggeration to be unparalleled on God’s earth? How comes this necklace of bright emerald to clasp the bosom of sterile mountain and dead desert, stretching on other sides to the horizon? The solution is made to every traveller, when, entering the south-western gate, the ear catches the welcome sound of rippling, musical streams, irrigating far and wide (by an intricate network of channels) that luxuriant plain,—nurturing and stimulating the growth of rarest flower and delicious fruit,—washing the base of the houses of the city, and furnishing their gardens and marble-paved courtyards with sparkling fountains. A few days afterwards revealed, still more strikingly, the secret of all this fertility, when on our way to the Temples of Baalbec we rode for miles alongside the sister stream to which Naaman gives the priority in his

enumeration. Of all rivers (although in one sense it may be more appropriately designated by a less pretentious epithet), there is none that makes so deep an impression on the explorer as this wonderful Abana.* If the well-known word "arrowy" can be applied to any flowing waters, be they great or small, in either hemisphere, it is surely to this impetuous, gushing torrent which, rising from subterraneous springs in the plain of Bukkâ in Coele Syria, has reclaimed and beautified an otherwise barren wilderness.† It does, on a

* *Al Barada*—the modern name—in Arabic, means "the cold." The Hebrew name means "the clear."—*Schwartz*.

† "There is a goodly sound of waters echoed from lofty rocks. After months upon the quiet level of the Suez Canal and the oily running Nile, and the waves of the Red Sea, and the broad sheet of Lake Menzaleh, it was true luxury to be whirled in the swift eddies of Abana, and to speed at a river's gallop among rocks and forests."—"*Rob Roy*" on the *Jordan*, &c., p. 122.

The writer regretted much having omitted to visit the main feeder of the Barada at 'Ain Fijeh, although the *détour* would have been an easy one. The following is the picture given of it by two observant travellers :—"The mighty fountain of 'Ain Fijeh supplies two-thirds of the waters of the "golden-flowing" river. As the road winds down the glen, we take a sudden turn to the right, by a steep descent, overshadowed by noble walnut-trees, under which our tents were erected. Just under the high-road the rock is steeply scarped by nature, and at its foot bursts forth, without the slightest premonitory warning, a flood of purest water,

miniature scale, for a portion of the deserts of Anti-Libanus in its sinuous course, what the great African river does for the wastes of Egypt, transforms the narrow strip through which it rolls its furious eddies into a garden. On either

icy cold, thirty feet wide, and five feet deep. It pours forth with a roar like thunder as it leaps from the narrow cave, and dashing down the glen for one hundred yards, it forms, rather than joins, the Barada. Over the cave are the remains of a massive though small temple of Cyclopean stones, anterior to Greek or Roman architecture, and another little temple by its side without a name or tradition, sacred, no doubt, to the goddess of the fountain. What a home for a poet's dream of nymphs! . . . The water was so clear we might have seen a needle at the bottom; the sound of the rushing torrent drowned our voices in the tents; the little birds sitting above the spray vainly essayed to make their cheery challenge heard above the din. . . . At night, the reflections of the blue and white torrent, lit up by the moon, gleamed through the trees."—*Dr Tristram*.

"I believe," says *Miss Beaufort*, "this is one of the fullest sources in the world, springing at once as it does into a river. It is the clearest water possible, and singularly bright in colour, in the morning a full, deep emerald green, in the evening a sapphire blue; it was impossible to help thinking of the two jewels, so exactly did it resemble their clear, gem-like hues by times. . . . It is a delicious place: the valley, scarcely 200 yards wide, cannot contain itself for joy at its own luxuriance, but flings up orchard after orchard, vineyard after vineyard, upon the mountain at each side, and the river goes laughing through the woods, pouring out lapfuls of riches as it goes, and merrily bathing the tree-roots that revel in its cooling stream."—*Egyptian Sepulchres and Syrian Shrines*, vol i. p. 298.

side, as it nears the plain, are walls of barren sand or white glaring limestone, with here and there patches of dwarfed and scorched vegetation struggling vainly for life,—drought apparently swaying, over all, a perpetual sceptre. But, “everything shall live whither the river cometh” (Ezek. xlvii. 9). If the prophet of Chebar had wandered to this old-world city, of whose “wares, emeralds, purple and brodered work, the wine of Helbon, and white wool” he specially speaks, he might well have gathered materials for his vision from the stream which gladdens and glorifies it. “By the river, upon the bank thereof, shall grow all trees for meat, whose leaf shall not fade, neither shall the fruit thereof be consumed” (Ezek. xlvii. 12). We noted, among others, its own ancestral cedar, though of diminutive form, —olive, fig, and pomegranate, rows of minaret-like poplars, arbutus and willow, apricots and walnuts, together with gigantic reeds and pink oleanders similar to what had been familiar, ten days before, lining the shores of Gennesaret. The mountain peasant, or “fellah,” was engaged in raising along its banks crops of wheat and maize; the almost

forgotten water-wheel, either at rest or revolving, was seen amid the partial screen of foliage ; while cattle, large and small, browsed on the verdant patches of irrigated meadow.* After a magnificent course through these mountains, whose very nakedness increases by contrast the wealth of tropical luxuriance at their base, the Abana de-

* Those who have made a pilgrimage at the same season through these highlands of the ancient tetrarchy of Abilene (Luke iii. 1) will doubtless recognise the truthfulness of Dr Tristram's description, which, as a naturalist, he is so well able to give:—"All was teeming with the life of early summer. Little locusts of every variety of colour started from the grass at every step we took, grilling harshly as they expanded from their sandy sheaths their bright wings of blue, red, yellow, violet, and then suddenly closing them, dropped motionless among the herbage. The banks of the river now were lined on both sides by an unbroken succession of fruit-orchards, and—happy sign of peaceful security !—each with its cottage embosomed among the trees. The cherry and the apricot were the principal fruits, and both were now ripe. Little groups of children were busy plucking them everywhere, and lading the panniers which were to carry them to the Damascus market. The beautiful golden oriole spread its wings resplendent in the sunlight, as it flitted from tree to tree feasting on the summer fruits : the wild refrain of Cetti's warbler burst forth from the rushes by the water-side, where the unseen songster was safe from discovery ; the hobby-hawk kept pursuing the locusts in the open, and seizing them with its claws in their flight ; and the dark-coloured Eleonora's falcon skimmed over the orchards, carrying terror amongst the feathered plunderers."

bouches through a gorge where the hill range terminates, and distributes with lavish bounty its treasures amid the groves and orchards of Damascus. It is not too much to say that that oldest city of the world,—“the head of Syria,” or in favourite Oriental simile, “the eye of the East,”—would have had no existence but for this “river of God which is full of water.” That oasis of verdure, which no desert mirage ever counterfeited or exceeded with its mimic beauty, derives it all from this baptismal font of prodigal nature. If the hill “Amana” in Solomon’s Song (iv. 8), a peak of Anti-Lebanon, be, as has been supposed, one of the sources of the Abana,* we can understand the figures, and their appropriateness to the scene, employed in that inspired allegory—“Come with me from Lebanon, my spouse, with me from Lebanon : look from the top of Amana, . . . a garden enclosed, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy

* The river is called to this day *Amana* by the Jews in Damascus.—*Schwartz*.

See also “*Keil on Kings*,” *in loco* :—“The ‘Abana’ probably identical with the ‘Amana,’ by commutation of the labials B and M, . . . is generally taken for the *Χρυσορροῖας* (of the Greeks), now called Barada, ‘the cold stream.’”

plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire with spikenard; spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon." "No wonder," to borrow once more from a graphic writer whose descriptions have been already quoted, "that the first wanderers from far-distant Chaldea were arrested by the luxuriant verdure, and planted here the oldest of existing cities. If the sight be so enchanting to us who visit it from the West, fresh from the forest of Lebanon, or the cornplains of Teim, what must it have seemed to those whose wearied feet had ached for days on the burning sands of the Eastern desert, unrelieved by a tuft of verdure since they left the halting-place of Tadmor in the wilderness? And that spot in Syria where man first built the city, he has never, amidst all the changes of empire, quitted for a day. Other rivers have known strange vicissitudes of fortune. For ages the Nile has swept past the deserted temples of Phylæ, and unbroken silence has reigned in the palaces of Thebes; long centuries have gone by, since the

tide of traffic passed up and down the Euphrates ; the hyena lurks in the gardens of Babylon ; the sand-drifts of the deserts have buried the arcades of Nineveh. But the hum of commerce has been uninterrupted for four thousand years on the banks of the Barada ; the caravans of Bagdad discharge their merchandize to-day in the bazaar where the servants of Abram unloaded their camels. No scrap of cultivation relieves the monotony of the lower Jordan, while the golden fruits of Damascus overhang the channels of the Barada as they did when the merchants of Midian carried the delicacies of Syria to the market of the Pharaohs."

One gospel memory alone is connected by clear inference with the Abana and Pharpar, but that is a very interesting one. It must have been in the waters of these rivers of Syria which Naaman loved so well, that Saul of Tarsus was baptized into the name of "that same Jesus" who met him on the Damascus highway, and transformed the persecutor into a chosen vessel of mercy. In these days when so much stress is laid on "sacramental efficacy" and the alleged virtue of "apostolic suc-

cession," it is surely worthy of note, that the holiest of saints, the greatest and most eminent of inspired apostles, had the baptismal rite administered to him, not from the sacred streams of Kedron, or Siloam, or Jordan, or other waters in the land of his fathers, but from "the golden river" of pagan story. Moreover, as there was no real or imaginary charm in the element, neither was there in the administrator of the ordinance. He received the sacramental sign by sprinkling or immersion, not from Peter, or James, or John—not from any apostle, or boasted "successor of the apostles," but from the hands of a humble, lowly, unknown disciple,—“one Ananias,”—whose best apostolical succession was his simple faith and brotherly love (Acts ix. 17, 18). Surely that one act of Christian baptism, specially appointed by God Himself for His greatest disciple, minister, and missionary, conveys an impressive testimony and rebuke to all “who teach for doctrine the commandments of men,” that “neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase” (1 Cor. iii. 7).

Nor can we wonder that the comparison on the

part of Naaman, between the one only river of Palestine and these mountain streams of Syria, should have been depreciatory as regards the former. Art, combined with the foregone conclusions of enthusiastic travellers, has done its best to make the "Waters of Israel" beautiful and picturesque. But these (and we speak of the Jordan specially)—though ever enshrined, independent of all accessories and surroundings, in the sanctuary of holiest thought—must be content, so far as natural attractiveness is concerned, to accept the unchanged verdict of the Syrian commander. Disguise it as we may, no memory of Palestine is so disappointing. The Jordan, at its most consecrated portion—the spot where in all likelihood the miraculous crossing took place, possibly not very far from the still holier locality of the Saviour's baptism, and with greater probability still, where at the summons of the Baptist "there went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins" (Matt. iii. 5)—is uninteresting in the extreme. Its waters are flanked by enormous mud-banks, partially and poorly hidden by coarse vegetation ;—a

reedy jungle relieved by no pebbly shore,—no rocks tinted with lichen and moss,—no bright foliage to hang in graceful tresses over the brown torrent. It is with a shock, those who are conversant with the clear, limpid waters of other countries, gaze for the first time on the stream associated to them with recollections so hallowed ;—whose very name, in manifold ways, has been incorporated in sacred hymn and song ;—“ the Border river,” washing the shores of “ the Better Land,”—the “ shining fields ” “ on the other side Jordan.” In one word, after having visited both the streams of Syria and of Palestine, we can emphatically endorse the verdict pronounced 2800 years ago—“ Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel ? ” *

* “ In contrast to the rivers of other countries, the Jordan, from its leaving the Sea of Galilee to its end, adds hardly a single element of civilisation to the long tract through which it rushes. It is, indeed, still the ‘ Sheriat el Khebar,’ the great watering-place of the Bedouin tribes, and so it must always have been. But it is the river of a Desert. ‘ The Desert,’ as we have seen, is the ordinary name by which its valley was known. . . . Within the narrow range of its own bed it produces a rank mass of vegetation.”—*Stanley's “ Sinai and Palestine,”* p. 284.

Moreover, the Jordan, as the river of the country, stood in farther marked contrast with other rivers of historic name, as

But we hasten from these features of mere local and geographical interest, to illustrate the imperishable spiritual lessons suggested and unfolded in this graphic tale of the pilgrimage of a Gentile soldier from his distant Lebanon home to the land of Israel. That river of which we have just spoken, transmuting barrenness into fertility, life into death, was to have its moral counterpart in the case of this cleansed leper and heathen chief.

having no city or town of eminence on its banks, if we except those girdling the Lake of Tiberias, which its waters intersected. Nineveh rose on the banks of the Tigris, Babylon on the Euphrates, Thebes and Memphis on the Nile, Rome on the Tiber ;—vessels crowding their harbours, which were alive with the commerce of the world. The capital of Judea, the city of solemnities, was at a distance of fifteen miles from the chief river of the country, and of no ship or vessel of any kind do we read, as having been launched on its waters. (The succession of rapids which mark its course, sufficiently account, indeed, for this latter.) The words of the Great Prophet have a beautiful meaning, as he alludes to the absence of that which conferred alike beauty and importance on other countries. Judea had in God Himself, and His covenanted presence, a sublime equivalent :—“ There the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams ; wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king ; He will save us” (Isa. xxxiii. 21, 22).

“ Two days,” quoting again from Mr Macgregor’s interesting narrative of his exploration of the rivers of Damascus, “ were

The votary of Rimmon is made a trophy of Divine grace, and, by loyal adhesion and allegiance to Israel's God, becomes the first of that "handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains," the fruit whereof is one day to "shake like Lebanon" (Ps. lxxii. 16).

The writer, fully conscious, in the subsequent pages, of his shortcomings in the treatment of an interesting subject, cannot better draw these introductory remarks to a close, than in the words of an old and quaint divine of the seventeenth

employed on foot or in the saddle in examining these complicated waterworks (of the Abana). The time was not spent fruitlessly, for it showed me why Naaman might well speak of the Abana as superior to Jordan, seeing that the former river waters a whole city and about a hundred villages and thousands of acres of richest land, whereas the Jordan, below the Sea of Galilee, waters only a strip of jungle."—*Rob Roy* on the Jordan, p. 120.

It may be well to add the result of the exploration of the Abana by the same energetic traveller. Singular is the identity to which he refers, in the termination of this "river of Damascus," with that of the "Waters of Israel:"—"The Abana dies in the marsh of Ateibeh, yielding its vapoury spirit to the hot sun, as Jordan faints away in the Dead Sea; and so, rising into the clouds again, both of them perhaps wafted aloft to the snow-peaks where they were born, pour down their old waters in a current ever new, in that circuit of death and life which God has ordained for all."—*Ibid.* p. 149.

century, who has written a copious volume on the incidents of this same chapter, and who thus terminates his dedicatory epistle :—" Wherefore, to conclude, I shall desire thee, good reader, to apply thyself with thy best care and prayers to peruse what God hath herein presented thee withal ; and if thou pickest anything out, bless Him, and pray for me." *

* "*D. Rogers, B. in divinity, and Minister of God's Word at Wethersf in Essex. MDCXLII.*" The volume, which proposes "to discover lively to the reader the spirituall leprosie of sinne and selfe love, besides sundry other remarkable points of great use," is a monument of patient labour in the shape of a ponderous folio, now rare ; it may be seen in the Library of the British Museum.

II


The Leper-Warrior.

“**NOW NAAMAN, CAPTAIN OF THE HOST OF THE KING OF SYRIA, WAS A GREAT MAN WITH HIS MASTER, AND HONOURABLE, BECAUSE BY HIM THE LORD HAD GIVEN DELIVERANCE UNTO SYRIA: HE WAS ALSO A MIGHTY MAN OF VALOUR; BUT HE WAS A LEPER.**”—2 KINGS V. 1.

The Leper-Warrior.

MANY are the pleasing and graphic incidents interspersed throughout Old Testament story, which have the scene of their occurrence laid in the Land of Promise. In the narrative, however, whose lessons are at present to engage our attention, we are called to cross the northern boundary of Lebanon to the contiguous kingdom of Syria, the long and troublesome rival of Israel. A period of quiescence had now happily supervened between the Hebrew tribes and their hereditary foe. King Benhadad and Joram were, for the time, on amicable terms, and a peaceful domestic picture opens to us, like a gleam of sunshine amid the storms of war.

Every country in the world has been proud of its illustrious soldiers. We may well believe that the empire of which Damascus was the capital, would not be behind in doing homage to military



genius,—that her highest honours would be heaped on “a mighty man of valour.” Such was NAAMAN, the most conspicuous among the group of figures in our narrative chapter—“the Earl marshal,” as an old writer calls him, “to the King of Aram;”—the commander-in-chief of the Syrian hosts, the favoured idol of a warlike race. Not long before, he had returned flushed with triumph at the head of his troops from the land of Israel. “By him,” we read, “the Lord had given deliverance* to the Syrians.” According to Jewish tradition (in the Midrash Tehillim †) it is he who is spoken of in the last chapter of 1st Kings, as the “certain man who drew a bow at a venture, and smote Ahab between the joints of the harness,” thereby deciding the fortunes of the day at Ramoth Gilead. By others, he is described in person as

* Keil remarks that “the Hebrew word rendered ‘deliverance,’ means not merely victory, but prosperity of every kind, in which, no doubt, victory was included.”—*Keil “on Kings,” in loc.*

† Also “Josephus,” viii. 15, 5. It is remarkable that the story of Naaman’s pilgrimage and healing is not recorded in the pages of the Jewish historian, although elsewhere in his works there is a reference to lepers, and among these to “captains of great armies.” The interesting fact has been noted, that the only one of the Evangelists who records our Lord’s reference to Naaman’s cure, is Luke the physician.—*See Smith’s “Dic.,” in loc.*

of colossal stature—the Goliath of the north—a giant cedar in Lebanon. We may picture him, at all events, as a man of consummate abilities—the trusted adviser of his king—the pride of the army,—his name a household word alike in the palaces of Damascus and among the hamlets of Syria; invested, doubtless, by his master with the most distinguished insignia in the power of royalty to bestow—badges of “barbaric pearl and gold” conferred alone on rare personal prowess and in recognition of illustrious deeds. His home, we may farther imagine, would be one of the “paradises” in that ‘wilderness of gardens,’—a palatial dwelling, furnished and beautified with richest fabrics from looms of the old city,—trophies of victory adorning its walls, shields and bucklers and spears that had been gathered as spoil in many a hard won fight;—with all in external nature that could minister pleasure to eye and ear—the murmur of streams, the music of birds, the floral wealth of the most productive “clime of the sun.” So far, too, as we can gather from a few scattered hints contained in this brief narration, if we except the quick resentment and im-

patience of contradiction incident to the training of one born to be obeyed, Naaman's seems to have been a noble character. He was not only "a great man with his master," but "honourable,"—of an unblemished reputation. We may, moreover, claim for him (what is rare in such a proud position of eminence and power), traits of amiability, benignity, goodness. His was not the haughty and supercilious mien which forbade confidential freedom of intercourse with those in lowlier station. His servants were not afraid to call him "My father;" nor did a Hebrew slave tremble (as she would have done in the presence of a tyrannical superior) to offer kindly counsel on his behalf. Her affectionate interest in his circumstances, at once bespeaks our favour for master and dependant.

But there is something preying on that lofty soul. NAAMAN is supposed to mean "*beautiful*," "*lovely*," "*goodly to look upon*."* Alas! the

* A different though somewhat kindred derivation is given by the great German Hebraist. "The proper name NAAMAN," says he, "which passed from Aramean countries into Arabic as Nomân, is derived from the name of an ancient Aramean God of love, which is still preserved in the name of the flower."—*Ewald's History of Israel*, vol. iv. p. 86.

name in his case was little else now than a cruel mockery. A foul worm is shrivelling up the gourd which trellised the earth-bower of his glory;—a pestilential touch has turned his gold into base alloy. The most dreaded of Eastern diseases, and that, too, in its most malignant form, has assaulted his body, and will soon convert it into a living, loathsome charnel-house.* If he had been a Hebrew by birth, he would have been doomed to cheerless solitude,—shut up night and day, the lonely tenant of a darkened chamber, separated hopelessly from the outer world, and denied intercourse with his own domestic circle,—warning all who came near him of the contagious nature of his plague, by the utterance of the cry, “Unclean ! unclean !”

“Room for the leper ! Room ! And as he came,
The cry passed on.

Forthwith, aside they stood—

* This was evidently the white leprosy, from the reference in ver. 27, “A leper as white as snow.” The Author may here repeat what he has noted elsewhere—that the most doleful memory of a brief sojourn in Palestine and Syria is in connection with the sight of lepers, and especially with the row of unhappy victims seated outside the Jaffa and Damascus gates at Jerusalem.

Matron and child, and pitiless manhood—all
Who met him on his way, and let him pass.
And onward through the open gate he walked
A leper, with the ashes on his brow,
Sackcloth upon his loins ; he seemed like one
Whose heart is with an iron curb repressed,
Crying, 'Unclean ! unclean !'

Although it is evident from the narrative, that this rigid seclusion, so imperative in the case of the Jew, was not enforced in the country north of Hermon (for Naaman continued to discharge the duties of the highest civil office of the state), yet his must necessarily have been the most miserable of existences. The red spot, the well-known herald symptom, must at least have *appeared*, which would end in the ulcered face, the shrivelled skin, the croaking voice, the glaring eyes, the wasted fingers (soon rendering him unable to draw the bow which had served him heir to his renown), the wreck of memory, the premature decay of a tortured body, the depression and despondency of mind, the constant dread of imparting to others the terrible inheritance, the feverish and chronic restlessness which made life a burden. That ever-present thought—rather, we should say, that

terrible reality—would pursue him everywhere, dogging his heels like a hideous spectre. It would haunt him as he sat with his chiefs by watchfire and bivouac on the tented field. It would dim and fret and darken the hour of triumph, when amid the blare of trumpets and shout of citizens, he rode in the chariot of victory through the streets of Damascus. When he headed the festal throng, and entered Rimmon's Temple with his master, it would seem as if the grim idol, in some fit of wanton, retributive vengeance, had set upon him this terrible brand—selected him as victim of the supposed curse-mark of earth's avenging deities, which even the Hebrews considered to be Jehovah's visible scourge, and which they called "the finger of God." Of no avail to him were the thousand charms of his Eden-home. Each setting sun, as it tipped Hermon's crest with gold, chronicled the nearer approach of the enemy his valour could never vanquish.

Such was NAAMAN. "He was a great man with his master, and honourable, BUT he was a *leper*." *

* The "house of Naaman the Syrian" is still shown outside the eastern gate at Damascus. However apocryphal the site may be, an Hospital for lepers is appropriately built upon it.

Let us learn from this touching history, *the vanity of all earthly glory*. On the lintels of that princely home in Aram's princely capital, are written the words, "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man is as the flower of grass." He who seemed to have been once "fair" and "beautiful" as he was brave and generous, may have the Prophet's wail appropriately uttered over him—"How is the staff broken, and the *beautiful* rod!" His beauty "consumes away like a moth." The hero, whose martial deeds the matrons and damsels of city and village, like those of Israel, had celebrated with timbrel and harp,* would envy the lot

* The following is the spirited *Epinikion* or "song of victory," rendered into music worthy of the theme, in Sir Michael Costa's Oratorio of NAAMAN. It is supposed to be sung on the return of the Conqueror from his recent triumph.

"Chorus of people.—

With sheathed swords and bows unstrung,
And spears and shields with garlands hung,
Our mighty men of valour come !
Our glorious Captain of the war
Returneth in his prancing car,
Triumphal to his home !

Our enemies are servants now ;
Beneath the slavish yoke they bow
To Syria's mighty king.

of the fettered captive or squalid beggar in the cells or streets of Damascus.

“O worse than chains,
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!”

—[*Samson Agonistes.*]

“Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.”
“Verily, every man at his best state is altogether vanity!” In vain have courtly physicians lavished on him their skill. In vain have the balsam-orchards of the Abana distilled their healing

Benhadad's darts in heroes' hands,
Whenever Naaman commands,
Are plumed from Victory's wing!

Naaman's wife.—

The many-voic'd crowd,
Exulting, shouteth loud
My noble hero's name and worth.
Maidens, advance with song and dance,
And welcome him and all with mirth!

Chorus of maidens.—

Welcome, Syria's defender,
Dread of all her enemies:
Unto thee her debtors render
Praise for thy great victories.

Naaman! thy deeds of glory
When thy noble race is run,
Shall reanimate the story
Told by father unto son!”

treasures. In vain have sorcerers and magicians exercised their occult arts. In vain has he, again and again, in piteous supplication bent his knee in the national sanctuary, and loaded the shrine of the idol god with propitiatory bribes. The malady is inveterate. That plague-spot embitters every hour of life, and throws the shadows of despair on an anguished future. Earth has no anodyne to soothe his tortured spirit; he looks forward to the quiet rest of the grave as the only and welcome release from his load of misery. As the vile worm, in a long future age, refuted the asserted divinity of King Herod; so did this cruel monitor whisper the humbling lesson in the ear of the warrior—"Let not the mighty man glory in his might!"

"BUT he was a leper. True picture of human life! Go the round of existence—mark these varying waves which fret and chafe on its shores. Who is there that has not to tell of some similar shadow projected on an otherwise bright—it may be the brightest path;—some flaw in the strong building, some blot on the fair temple pillar?

Let us gather a few testimonies.

Here is one who has all that the world can bestow ; BUT, as in the case of Naaman, disease is blanching his cheek, and appointing him wearisome days and restless nights. What to him, his ingots of gold and lavish luxuries and lordly demesnes, with these weary vigils of pain and suffering, which rarest skill and tenderest affection strive alike in vain to mitigate and abbreviate ?

Here is another with full health and strength ; the magic circle of home is unbroken ; no olive plant is missed around his table. He had boasted, moreover, in the multitude of his riches ; he had won his coveted place amid the aristocracy of wealth ;—the golden gate and key had been, as he thought, securely reached and won, opening into pleasure, ease, and splendour. But, “ in the same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaster of the palace wall, ‘ *Mene*, God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it.’ ” His worldly means, which he was a lifetime in amassing, have taken wings to themselves and fled. One wave of adversity has strewn the beach with the fragile ruins. Seated amid the wreck of his gilded treasures, he pursues

in silence the monotone of wounded pride and disappointed ambition—"All is vanity and vexation of spirit ;" while an inward voice, like the whisper of some avenging angel, seems to take up the parable, "Go to, now, ye rich men, . . . your gold and silver is cankered " (James v. 1-3).

Here is another, into whose lap the fabled horn of plenty has been poured. In addition to the possession of that mere vulgar wealth which is the satisfying goal of so many, he has honours, family possessions, pride of rank, resources of intellect, cultivated tastes. He has risen to honourable distinction, and enjoyed the pageantry of power. Before him Fame has blown her trumpet. He is drinking, apparently to the full, luscious draughts of earthly glory ; fondled and caressed by fawning crowds, the world points its finger, and says of him, "There, at least, is a happy man !" *But*, alas ! it knows not the secret wound that is preying on his spirit and poisoning the fountains of life. It knows not how he has to lock up in the depth of his heart of hearts the story of his prodigal ; how his very affluence is extorted to pay the wicked debts or to feed the riot and excess of a profligate life.

Here is another, occupying some similar coveted pinnacle of distinction, who has reached the goal of success, and distanced his fellows in the uncertain race. But, muffled from the world's eye and estimate, "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." That very success has roused the spleen of jealous rivals. Maligned, misunderstood, vilified, he is doomed to bear in silence the shafts of envy—it may be, the treachery and detraction of trusted friends.

Here is another, who has health and wealth, and unbounded material prosperity. Penury has never darkened his dwelling; the whisper of malice has never ruffled his peace; troops of true-hearted associates gather around his hearth; the widow and the orphan have been blest out of his abundant treasure, and he himself has been made richer thereby. BUT, ah! another and more terrible foe has made sad incursions on his homestead. The names to him most familiar and best beloved have been carved on tombstones. "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not." He can add his sorrowful testimony to myriads of broken hearts, that no golden key or golden gate can exclude the sleepless

foe—no golden bridle can rein in the “pale horse.” His “*but*”—his soliloquy—is the saddest of all—“Thou hast put lover and friend far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness !”

We need not enlarge. That little exceptional word qualifies every condition of life, whatever the characteristics of that condition may be. It blurs the gilded ceilings of the rich ; it leaves its impress, in diversified form, on the dwellings of the poor. It crops and ruffles the soaring wing of proud intellect. It puts its drag on the triumphal car in the hour of ovation. It is God’s voice addressing the crowd of weary humanity—“Arise, and depart ye, for this is not your rest ; it is polluted.”

This leads us to note, as a second general lesson, *That we should regard our trials as designed by God for our good.* Naaman’s trial was indeed no ordinary one. Of all humiliations, what to him could be more chafing and galling ? We know how captivating in the eyes of Orientals were outward attractions—personal form and lordly mien and bearing. How touchingly the

minstrel king laments the "beauty" of Israel—the twin heroes fallen in high places, who were "swifter than eagles and stronger than lions." Here was "the beautiful,"—the admired leader of the Syrian armies,—who was wont to be foremost in the fight and last in the field,—about to become helpless as a child, fit to be occupant not of the martial tent but of the lazar-house :—"from the sole of the foot even unto the head no soundness in him, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores" (Isa. i. 6). And yet in his case the parable was expounded—"Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness" (Judges xiv. 14). From that leper's couch there rose, as in the patriarch's night-vision, a ladder reaching to heaven. He, who, in an earthly sense, here renounced and forfeited the name "beautiful," was to be clothed upon with the beauty of the God of Israel, and to have a name given him better than that of sons or of daughters.

And is it not so with the Lord's people still? His dispensations are often incomprehensible. His name to them is that which He gave to

Manoah,—“Wonderful,” “Secret,” “Mysterious.” That wearing sickness, that wasting heritage of pain, these long tossings on a fevered, sleepless pillow ; where can there be love or mercy there? But the silence and loneliness of the sickbed is the figurative “wilderness,” whither He “allures” that He may “speak comfortably unto them, and give them their vineyards from thence” (Hosea ii. 14, 15), rousing them from the low dream of earth, from the sordid and the secular, from busy care and debasing solicitude, to the divine and the heavenly. Or, that unexpected heritage of penury—the crash of earthly fortune—the forfeiture of earthly gain—the stripping the walls of cherished and familiar treasure, and sending those nursed in the lap of luxury penniless on the world—where is there mercy or love here? But it is through this salutary though rough discipline, that He weans from the enervating influence of prosperity, leading them to exchange the mess of earthly pottage for the bread of life—perishable substance for the fine gold of heavenly gain and durable riches. Or, that cruel blighting of young hope and pure affection—the withering of some

cherished gourd—the opening of early graves for the loving and beloved ; holiest ties formed, but the memory of which is all that remains. Where is there kindness and mercy in creating bonds only to sever them, raising up friends only to bury them ?—the plaintive experience and utterance of the lone mother in Israel, that of many—“ Call me not Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me” (Ruth i. 20). But the rills are dried by Him, in order to lead to the great Fountainhead ; the links of earthly affection are broken, in order that stronger and more enduring ones may be formed above ; the rents have been made in the house of clay, only to render more inviting “ the building of God—the house not made with hands ; ” —stimulating to live more for that world where there are no “ buts,”—where all is perfection—where we shall stand without a “ but ” and without a fault before the throne. Yes, suffering Christian ! believe it—your trials are designed by Him who sent them, as in the case of Naaman’s leprosy, to bring you nearer Himself. They are His own appointed gateways, opening up and admitting to great spiritual bless-

ings. The mother eagle is said purposely to put a thorn into her nest to compel her young brood to fly. If God gave us no thorn—if He never disturbed the downy nest of our worldly ease, we might be tempted to remain grovellers for ever. He knows us better; He loves us better. The day will come when these “buts” in our present lot, will extract nothing from us but grateful praise; when we shall joyfully testify, ‘Had it not been for these wilderness experiences—that leprosy—that protracted sickness—that loss of worldly position—the death of that cherished friend, I would still have been clinging to earth as my portion, content with the polluted rill and the broken cistern, instead of drawing water out of the wells of salvation. As it was Naaman’s malady which revealed to him his wretchedness and misery, and impelled him to cross the heights of Lebanon to the Prophet’s home in Israel; so are God’s children, by means of diversified trial, roused to the conscious reality of their spiritual danger—aye, and often too, to the presence and power of foes, fiercer than the beasts of prey which haunted these Syrian mountains. Thus are they prepared

to listen, as they would not otherwise have done, to the Divine voice (already quoted in the introductory chapter), as Naaman listened to it, though in another acceptation of the words, "Come with me from Lebanon, . . . with me from Lebanon : look from the top of Amana, from the top of Shenir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. . . . Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits ; camphire with spikenard ; spikenard and saffron ; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense ; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices : a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon" (Sol. Song iv. 8, 13-15).

We may gather a third lesson—*Not to envy others ; but to be content with our own lot, whatever that may be.* We little know what trials may be lurking in what seems an enviable position of life,—what adders may be sleeping in the flowery bank, or amid the bed of roses,—what rottenness and decay may be under the covering of virgin snow. "I was envious at the foolish," says

Asaph, "when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They are not in trouble, as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. . . . When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely Thou didst set them in slippery places; Thou castest them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (Ps. lxxiii. 12-19). Let us not be covetous of earthly greatness or exaltation—of climbing higher the dizzy pyramid of human opulence or ambition. If we reached the envied summit, we might in all likelihood find new vexations and trials to which we are strangers in a humbler and lowlier lot. Though God has appointed a diversity in human rank, we believe there is a greater equality, a nicer proportionate adjustment in human happiness, than is at first supposed. The increase of

riches or of honours brings too often only new cares, anxieties, and responsibilities. True substantial felicity is not dependent on circumstances, but on mind and character. Pass from many a splendid mansion in city or suburban life, its inmates pampered with all that wealth and luxury can give, but where, at the same time, there is pride or jealousy, or the smouldering fires of guilty passion;—pass from this to some shepherd's hut or shieling in one of our lonely mountain glens, the abode of honest toil, primitive virtue, and simple religion—where the debasement of malignant envy, and the effeminacy of demon vice are unknown—around whose frugal board a group of Nature's children are lovingly gathered;—and say, whether true sterling happiness is found under the gorgeous glitter or under the smoky rafter? Rather have the cottage with the “great gain” of godliness and contentment, than the palace without them. “A little that a just man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked.” Whatever be our earthly condition; whether it be at the extremes of opulence and poverty, or the commoner lot of lowly mediocrity, be this our alone object of aspiration and emulous

desire, to have God as our portion ;—the possession of that loving Father's smile, which transfigures, and glorifies all we are and all we have,—transmuting the basest metal into the gold of Ophir. . The poorest, so far as the world is concerned, if they have an interest in these better riches, can adopt as their own, the Apostle's paradox—" Having nothing, yet possessing all things."

" O Thou bounteous Giver of all good,
Who art of all Thy gifts Thyself the crown ;
Give what Thou canst, without Thee we are poor,
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away ! "

Finally, before closing these preliminary remarks, let us admire and adore the Divine sovereignty. What more unlikely subject to be humbled in the dust—brought to take the place of a little child, than that benighted idolater of a heathen land—an utter stranger to the true Jehovah ; inflated, as he could hardly fail to be, with the pride of rank and the pride of conquest ; accustomed to adulation and flattery ; moreover, with the scar of leprosy to stir and stereotype into rebellion, every feeling of his better nature ? It would seem easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for

this commander of the hosts of Syria to seek for mercy at the hands of the God and the Prophet of a hated race! But that God had loved him with an everlasting love; and He will take His own means of saying "to the north, Give up," and of bringing this son "from afar." He goes to this poor victim of a loathsome disease, racked with torture amid the splendid mockeries of purple divan and downy pillow and tapestried chamber, (yet truly a bed of sackcloth and ashes), and says, "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold" (Ps. lxxviii. 13). Oh, how wondrous are these sovereign purposes and decrees of Jehovah! Who *can* resist, "who *hath* resisted His will?" We love to think, that all events are in His hand—from the creation of worlds and the revolution of empires, to the fall of the raindrop and the sparrow,—and that the complicated wheels of providence are ever revolving and evolving nothing but good. Is it nations, hatching schemes of wicked war, and wild ambition, and aggrandisement? How comforting to think that there is an eye upon every such seething cauldron of human

passions ! that there is a hand covering the craters of these slumbering volcanoes, preventing the imprisoned fires bursting forth until " the Lord gives the word." Nay, more, that when the lava-stream breaks forth on its mission of desolation and judgment, it is only for an appointed season and an appointed reason ; and that His own Church will come forth from the fierce alembic " fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." There is One in heaven who has the hearts of kings in His hands, and who turneth them even as He turneth the rivers of waters. " O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. . . . Behold the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, shall lop the bough with terror, and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled ! And He shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and LEBANON shall fall by a mighty One " (Isa. x. 5, 33, 34).

And He who rules over worlds and empires, rules over the individual human spirit ; controls, in the case of each, the empire of thought and the fitful human will. See how, by the power of His

omnipotent Spirit, He led this haughty soldier of Damascus; how in time He conquered the pride of rank, the pride of fame, the pride of riches, the pride of heathen religion, the pride of self-independence, and made him a monument of His grace and mercy. As we gaze upon Naaman in his solitary chamber, with ulcered body and reddened eye, shunned by his fellows, weary and desponding of life;—moreover, the votary of a pagan divinity, and shrinking, as we would have thought, from recognising the hand and owning the power of the tutelary deity of his country's enemies,—we may well, on all human calculations, adopt the hopeless words of the Prophet in more than their literal sense—"Can the Ethiopian change his skin?" But what is impossible with men is possible with God. By a variety of simple coincidences in His providence, He is to bring the leper-warrior, like the Hebrew king, to disown all human confidences, and to say, "In the Lord put I my trust; why say ye to my soul, Flee, as a bird, to your mountain?" (Ps. xi. 1).

Shall we, moreover, ask, What was it that recommended Naaman to the notice and regard of the

Jehovah of Israel,—leading Him to select that wild olive among the rocks of Syria, to be grafted into the true olive-tree? Was it his valour, his victories, his martial mien and noble bearing, his political sagacity or astute statesmanship, or brilliant talents? No, these were but the qualities of earth; there was nothing god-like about them; they won only the hosannahs of this world. Personal claim on God's favour he had none. The whole secret of His selection is thus unfolded—"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." "I will call them my people which were not my people" (Rom. ix. 25). God had, in the sovereignty of His own divine decrees, from all eternity inserted the name of this Aramite chief in higher and better than any martial roll-call—one among a noble army of warriors who have since in every age "fought the good fight of faith, and laid hold on eternal life." It is worthy of remembrance that the Divine Redeemer, in the course of His earthly ministry, took this same story of the Syrian soldier to enforce and illustrate the theme of which we speak. How, while "many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus

the Prophet, none of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke iv. 27). The lepers of the covenant-nation were passed by. The leper of a Gentile kingdom—and that kingdom, too, the sworn foe of Israel—was selected. Still does the same Lord, "who is rich unto all that call upon Him," love to manifest and magnify His sovereignty, and the sovereignty of His grace, in hardened hearts which He breaks, and stubborn wills He subdues, and proud spirits He brings to lie low and submissive at the cross of His Son. Still He can fashion the unlikeliest and unshapeliest stones for His heavenly temple, and show that it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of Himself that showeth mercy. "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubabel thou shalt become a plain." "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. iv. 6, 7). "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and

things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. i. 27-29). Side by side with Rimmon's shrine, is to be erected a new altar-stone, with the strange inscription carved upon it by a proud heathen, "JEHOVAH ROPHI"—"I am the *Lord* that healeth thee."

Are there any who read these pages, to whom the taint of a deeper and more malignant disease than that of Naaman is adhering, which is excluding them, as effectually as did the leprosy among the Jews of old, from all holy fellowship; and specially from fellowship and communion with the Great Father of Spirits,—leaving them "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise?" All that you have, in the shape of material bliss, will avail you nothing in this awful self-isolation from goodness and from God,—an isolation in which you feel you cannot in happiness live, and in which you dare not expect in peace to die. You may, like Naaman, have the world smiling on you—Fortune strewing your path with her capricious

favours—your name borne on the plaudits of the multitude ; but there is a fretful ulcer, a moral virus within, which poisons and destroys all outward good. Is there no voice of mercy, no message of peace for *you*, and such as you ? “ Is there no balm in Gilead ? is there no physician there ? ” Yes ; the gospel discloses a wondrous way, by which the spiritual leper—(and that, too, even if his case should be the worst—apparently excluded hopelessly from the camp of the true Israel), may have a new name given, and become in the true sense of the word—“Naaman,” “beautiful.” He who is the alone Ideal of “the Beautiful”—who appropriates to Himself the name of “the Beautiful Shepherd,” * who gave His life for the sheep (John x. 11), thus addresses you—“Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest”—“Though your sins be as scarlet, they

* *Kalós*, “goodly, beautiful, as used in Matt. xiii. 45, Luke xxi. 5.”—*Parkhurst's Greek Lexicon*. Still more impressively is the same epithet applied (in Hebrew) to the MESSIAH, in the opening apostrophe of Ps. xlv.—“Thou art *fairer* than the children of men.” Thus rendered, more in conformity with the emphasis of the original, by two able commentators : “Beautiful, beautiful art Thou.”—*Dr Alexander*. “Thou art beautiful with beauty, among the sons of men.”—*Bonar on “The Psalms.”*

shall be as white as snow; and though they be red like crimson (red and revolting, like the hue on the skin of leprosy), they shall be as wool" (Isa. i. 18). A deep sense of the vileness of sin, and a longing to get rid of it, combined with the realised consciousness of your own inability to do so, are the only conditions of acceptance and cure. It is said in a striking verse, "He will *beautify* the meek with salvation;" and yet again, "The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way." "*The meek*"—who are they? The contrite, the lowly, the broken-hearted—those who, like the Syrian warrior, are willing to cast all their own grounds of cobweb-confidence "to the moles and to the bats,"—who, turning their back on the Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, and their face toward the waters of Israel, are ready to say, in the words of one who keenly felt the pain and bitterness, in a spiritual sense, of the leper's separation from the camp of the true Israel, and longed, above all, for reponement in the forfeited love and fellowship of Him whose favour is life—"Purge me with hyssop" (the leper's appointed means of purification), "and I shall be

clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
. . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew
a right spirit within me. . . For Thou desirest not
sacrifice, else would I give it; Thou delightest not
in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a
broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O
God, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. li. 7, 10, 16,
17).

III.

The Little Captive Maid.

“AND THE SYRIANS HAD GONE OUT BY COMPANIES, AND HAD BROUGHT AWAY CAPTIVE OUT OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL A LITTLE MAID; AND SHE WAITED ON NAAMAN’S WIFE. AND SHE SAID UNTO HER MISTRESS, WOULD GOD MY LORD WERE WITH THE PROPHET THAT IS IN SAMARIA! FOR HE WOULD RECOVER HIM OF HIS LEPROSY.”—2 KINGS V. 2, 3.

The Little Captive Maid.

THE God of heaven has high purposes of love and mercy in store for this idolatrous leper.

How is he to be reached? By what means, and through what instrumentality, is he to be brought up out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, and have a new song put into his lips? We are irresistibly led to recall the case of another "great man and honourable,"—"as touching the righteousness of the law blameless,"—who was arrested many ages afterwards, within sight of the same Syrian palace and capital; when a glorious light from the midday firmament struck him blinded and speechless to the ground, and unfolded to his inner gaze the adorable Lord he was persecuting. Will the God of Israel employ a similar miraculous agency and intervention now? Will He make bare His holy arm in the sight of heathen Damascus,—congregate the prophets of Rimmon

by the banks of Abana and Pharpar, as He did those of Baal, not many years before, on the heights of Carmel,—and demonstrate, by the instantaneous cure of their hero, that “Jehovah alone is the Lord?” Varied are the arrows in His quiver. He can, if He will, adopt great means to effect small purposes ; and He can use the weakest and feeblest instrumentality to secure great purposes. He committeth, in the present case, the treasure to a tiny earthen vessel, that the excellency and the power may appear to be altogether of Himself.

Among the trophies of conquest in the halls of this warrior, there is a *living* one. During the last campaign, the victorious troops of Benhadad, when ravaging the towns and villages of Israel, had taken, as part of their booty, a little damsel, who had become a servant in Naaman's household. Like another northern chieftain of more ancient date (Judges v. 30), the commander-in-chief of the armies of Damascus may have claimed as his prescriptive right, possession of the young Hebrew captive ; and, either from commiseration of her fate, the attractiveness of her disposition, or the grace and comeliness of her person,

(possibly all combined), he made her over to his wife, to become one of her slaves or female attendants. Perhaps, however, it is not needful for us to infer, from the narrative, any such regular incursion and plunder of the Syrian soldiers, to account for her presence in the home of Naaman. She may more probably have been the victim of lawless private adventurers,—seized by one of those marauding bands (here spoken of as “companies”), who kept the mountain borderland of Israel in a state of chronic terror. In those rude and savage times, more especially were the passes of Lebanon infested with freebooters, who waylaid caravans to and from Damascus, or made a sudden midnight attack on the defenceless villages of the Hebrews, carrying off their children, and selling them as slaves in the markets of Syria.

The brevity and simplicity of the Scripture account, leaves untold and unrecorded those circumstantialia, which, in other narratives, would have given pathos and romance to the story of this foray. We are left to surmise all the young creature must have felt on that wild night of terror,

when, wrenched by these pitiless mercenaries from the arms of those she loved, she was hurried in cruel indignity across the rough gorges of Hermon, ignorant alike of her own destiny and of the fate of the cherished ones she left behind;—the bitter memory cleaving to her sensitive spirit of their mocked tears and stifled, unavailing prayers—the cry, it may be, of parental anguish ascending unheeded amid the flashing of swords and the bursting of smoke and flame,—involving hamlet, vineyard, and oliveyard in mournful desolation and ruin. Then, perchance, the sad sequel of being conveyed for sale to the slavemarket of the capital, where the most recent travellers to Damascus tell us there is prosecuted, at this hour, the same infamous traffic.

Be all this, however, as it may ; whether as part of the spoil of a victorious army, or a private purchase from a slave-dealer, this we know, that the God who had directed the steps of that captive maid to an alien land, had a high purpose to subserve in appointing as her destiny the dwelling of the Syrian warrior. As has already been incidentally observed, we think it may be inferred from the whole

story, that she had become attached to his person, and was touched by his misfortunes. Moreover, she had carried with her to the place of captivity many sacred and devoted memories of the land of her birth. She had probably been the inmate of a pious Hebrew home, where the name of her father's God was adored, and His prophets were revered. She had witnessed her new master's sufferings. She may have listened to his many mournful soliloquies, as with hurried step he paced his solitary chamber by day, or made its walls resound with his moans by night. If she had been the down-trodden flower which most of the heathen slaves at that age of the world were, she must have muffled her own feelings of tender pity, and allowed her tears to flow in silence ; dreading him, moreover (from her hereditary impressions), as bearing in his person the outer and visible symbol of a divine judgment. But it betokens the kindly and confidential atmosphere in which she moved, when we see this little captive hastening unabashed to her mistress, and with all the fulness of a sympathising heart, and the tear of kindly devotion trembling in her eye, exclaiming, " Would God, my lord were with the

prophet that is in Samaria ! for he would recover him of his leprosy."

Had she seen the illustrious successor of the Tishbite ? This we know not. As the prophets of Israel (and none more so than Elisha) were continually on the move, going from city to city, and from hamlet to hamlet, it is possible her youthful imagination was full of remembrances of his reverend form and holy words. At all events, she had heard of what Israel's God had done by his hand ; and when she thought of the prodigies wrought by his instrumentality, and which had filled Palestine with his fame—dividing the waters of the Jordan with the mantle of Elijah—transforming into sweetness the bitter fountains of Jericho—and above all, restoring to life the Shunammite's son, we need not wonder at her young and ardent faith and love kindling at the thought, "*Can He, who has thus stormed death itself, and spoiled the great spoiler of his prey, not cure my master ?* I shall at least seek to requite his kindness towards an unprotected slave, by making the attempt!" Her childlike nature has an instinctive assurance, that the God of her fathers

is not the exclusive, unloving, isolated Being which then, as now, stern sectaries and narrow bigot Rabbies would make Him ;—that He had lately revealed Himself to the greatest of all the prophets—not in the tempest, nor earthquake, nor fire, but in the “still small voice” (1 Kings xix. 11, 12). Her footsteps, perhaps, may at first have faltered ; her young heart may have been full of misgivings. Many in her position would have been repelled with the thought, that to venture on such a suggestion would be unwarranted and rash presumption. “But the thing is from the Lord.” She is willing, with a heroine spirit, to brave and dare all ;—the smiles of the incredulous, the frowns of the disapproving, the scorn of fawning courtiers. No time can be lost—delay may be fatal. The horrible disease is already projecting on the path of Naaman the shadow of death. So, committing her cause to a Mightier than all the mighty ones of earth, she ventures into the presence of her mistress and makes her disinterested and impassioned suit

There are many lessons to be derived from this simple incident. Let us note—

(1.) That *God often works by feeble means*. A girl—"a *little maid*"—a hated Hebrew—a slave. What influence can *she* have on a man whose name was so lately the pride and terror of all Syria? As well speak of an infant uprooting the monarch-tree, or turning the course of the roaring mountain-torrent.

Not unfrequently, by small, and apparently inadequate instrumentality, does the Divine Being magnify His own greatness and power. Even in the natural world, great results are often accomplished by trifling agencies. It is a little insect that rears in the sea-caves its tier on tier of coral rocks—the wreckers of navies, and the dread of the mariner. The snow-flake, which passes with velvet footfall to the earth, loads the avalanche which bears terror and destruction among Alpine valleys and their smiling hamlets. It is the tiny acorn, of which the child can make a plaything, that is the germ of the giant oak—the former wooden-wall of our island home—the old type and palladium of a great nation's strength.

So the Almighty, at times, uses the feeblest and unlikeliest means to effect His purposes.

He who employed the crowing of a cock to melt the heart of Peter, and the dumb ass speaking with man's voice to rebuke the madness of the Prophet, can consecrate the humblest, and even meanest things, to be the ministers of His will and the preachers of His truth. Who need ever despise the day of small things, when we see a young maiden from the valleys of Palestine, preparing, by a few simple words uttered in faith, a pathway for a royal chariot; and better still, leaving to all subsequent ages the legacy of a story of grace, which has interested and moved every heart where the Bible is known and loved? Yes, it is often not the powerful sermon—not the wasting sickness—not the desolating bereavement. These are often suffered to pass unheeded; their echoes falling fainter and yet fainter on the soul, like the dying reverberations of the retreating thunder. But how often is “a word in season”—a child's look or saying, a simple tract, a passing funeral, a loving memory from the grave, the tender and guileless ways of the departed, the hymn of infancy, the mother's prayer lisped at a time we almost fail to recall—how often are these

slender arrows winged with unutterable blessings ! These are the "little maids" of Naaman's house, —little wedges inserted that rend the rocky heart in pieces—little levers, which, in the hand of God, elevate and regenerate the whole moral being.

(2.) Learn, that *all of us, in our varied spheres, may exert an influence for good*. Let none say, "My sphere is worthless, because limited ; my influence is unavailing, because restricted and circumscribed. Who would listen to so feeble a voice—who would be swayed by so humble an example as mine?"

Who dare say so, after perusing the story of the Hebrew maid ? If ever one seemed to be excluded, by her position, from doing aught influential, it was this helpless slave-girl—this forgotten flower—this exotic in a heathen palace, drooping its dewy leaves in an alien soil. But the law of *kindness* was in her heart ; and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth spake. Out of the mouth of this babe, God perfected praise because of her enemies, that He might still the enemy and the avenger (Ps. viii. 2). Her gentle, unselfish, disinterested con-

duct is worthy of all note. If she had been like many—like most—plucked rudely away from her paternal hearth and home, and doomed to a life of slavery—she would have resented the injury. If feelings of retaliation had influenced her, she would have watched with malicious pleasure the progress of the disease that was sapping her master's frame. She would have kept secreted, in the depths of her heart, the knowledge of the great Prophet who might in the name of his God bid it for ever away. But acting on those gospel motives and principles, afterwards revealed, of "love to an enemy,"—"overcoming evil with good;"—with no resentment in her bosom, but with that bosom bleeding only at the sight and cries of a fellow-sufferer, she rushes to her mistress, and with earnest tones prefers the prayer—"Would God, my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!"

Perhaps we may be warranted to infer more from the narrative. Who knows, but in that lowly, childlike bosom, the good seed of everlasting life may have early been sown and taken root; that the blessings of her father's God may have

lighted up her own soul with peace and joy, and that she may have long been yearning, with avidity, to impart to her heathen master and mistress those glorious truths regarding Israel's Jehovah, which had made her own country and her own heart what they were? Perchance, in her solitary hours, the imprisoned bird may have wondered with herself—'How can I sing the Lord's song in this strange land? When shall I have the favourable opportunity of unlocking the long pent-up secret, which, for weary months I have been desirous of telling to this darkened household?' She may often have gone, as an attendant on her royal mistress, to the house of Rimmon; and gazing there in sadness on the senseless image, the psalm of her own minstrelking may have come to mind—"Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have hands, but they handle not; feet have they, but they walk not, neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." The opportunity she has long desired seems at last to offer itself. Now is the time for that caged

"nightingale" to warble the notes that had long struggled for utterance, and "to sing the songs of Zion in the darkness of Syria."* Her prayers are heard. It is said in one of the Psalms, "The Lord gave the word, great was the company of them that published it." But now, when the Lord gave the word, *feeble* was the voice of her that published it. Yet "as arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth" (Ps. cxxvii. 4). How much was dependent on that proclamation!—how much was bound up in the few words that fell from the mouth of that child!—how many were destined to be affected by them! Syria—her king—her hero-chief—his household—his soldiers—multitudes in Israel, and we in every age. We know not where her dust was laid at her decease, whether in Naaman's mausoleum at Damascus—resting side by side with the warrior's ashes—or in her own native valley in Palestine—"gathered to her fathers." But this we know, that her epitaph has been in all lands and in all hearts, and that at this hour she "being dead, yet speaketh."—That

* *Krummacher.*

little wave, rising at the gate of Syria, is rippling still!

Would that we might all fully realise the lesson which is here taught us. There is no such thing as a *negative* character; we must either be like the aromatic plant, distilling fragrance, or like the upas-tree, casting around us the shadow of death. Let us seek to live, that *while* we live, the world may be the better for us, and when we die, the world may miss us. Remembering too that it is small things, done from pure beneficent motives, which often stir the main tides of human feeling. It was a *little* matter for a slave-girl to think kindly and considerately of her master; but unless it had been for that thought and utterance, the vast cavalcade we shall come by and by to notice, with royal interchanges closing with a miraculous deed, would have been unknown, and the world would have missed one of the most touching interludes in the inspired drama. God promises to those who are faithful over a *few* things, that they shall be made rulers over many things. "He accepteth according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not."

(3.) May we not, akin to this, and arising out of it, be taught another lesson—the *value of little kindnesses*? It is only the few in the world who are able to afford the large and munificent gift. But all are capable, in some way or other, of making their fellows happier, by gracious words and ways and deeds. That Syrian slave had neither silver nor gold. If she had, they could have been of no avail in smoothing an anguished brow. She had nothing but a *feeling heart*—sympathy for a hapless sufferer. One thing only in the world could she do for him—she could tell him of an old seer in Israel, whose word might, in the name of her God, cure him, when all the skill of Damascus had failed. She lisps, in a few simple words, the kindly thought; and no sooner has she done so, than the servants and chariots are ordered to be in readiness. She has planted the seeds of hope in that bosom of despair.

How many there are, who, so far as the world's wealth is concerned, have little in their power;—many who sigh for more than they have, honestly believing that if they *had* more, they would be more bounteous in their liberality and more muni-

ficent in their deeds of kindness than their present limited means will allow ! To such be it said,—Do not covet the gifts you have not, but make use of what you *have*. If you cannot give your golden tributes of generosity, you can do, what in God's sight is equally acceptable—you can, by tender offices of lowly love, by unselfish interest in the sufferings and wants and sorrow of others, cast largest of all into His treasury. The daily visit to a bereaved neighbour—an unobtrusive call at a poor man's home—kindly advice to the young and inexperienced—the little attention shown to the unbefriended orphan or stranger—the nosegay taken to the bedside of the invalid—devotion to the tottering steps of age, or bearing with its infirmities, these are a few of the thousand little kindnesses which in the sight of God and man are of great price. At one time we see the counterpart and replica of this little slave of Naaman's household, speaking gently to the morose and peevish, and returning good for evil. At another, climbing the dark stair where poverty languishes in misery and rags, carrying the feeble pittance which love has spared, or giving to the palsied hand the cup of cold water.

At another, it is the Sabbath-school teacher plying his or her humble labours, where all, perchance, seems cheerless and unpromising. At another, it is the little daughter in a household smoothing the brow furrowed with pain, calming with loving looks and loving ways the fretted bosom, carrying music in her step and sunshine on her face, and causing, by these thousand winning ways, the irritabilities of natural temper to fade and melt at her approach like the mists before the beams of the morning. Ye to whom God has given the will and the way of exercising this blessed law of kindness, covet not greater or costlier possessions. You have the noblest of fortunes. Your wealth is inexhaustible. The wealth of the *hand* we do not depreciate (the rich may be noble almoners of God's bounties). The wealth of the *head* we do not depreciate. Intellect—sanctified, exalted intellect, is treasure greater than ingots. But the wealth of the *heart* is the greatest of the three. You may have neither money nor intellectual gifts; but if you have the large soul (loving and beloved) you will be remembered when gold will have perished, and intellectual sky-rockets will have melted into

darkness. Having these, you will be "like Jesus." You will resemble Him who "pleased not Himself,"—who "went about continually doing good." It was a saying of one of the world's greatest men, "Cæsar and Alexander conquered by *arms* ; Jesus Christ conquered by *love*."

And above all, how noble the mission of those, who, by little ways and little agencies, are the means, like the Hebrew maid, of saving a soul from death,—leading even one spiritual leper to better than all the waters of Syria ! Young man, young woman ! let the story of one, in age like yourselves, tell you what may be done by "a word spoken in *due season*." Shall we give wing to our imagination, and travel down to that Day of God when small and great shall stand before Him ? Yes ; the Syrian warrior is *there*, waving the palm-branch of better than all earthly triumphs ; and as he casts his blood-bought crown at the Redeemer's feet, his eye ranges along the white-robed multitude until it rests on one who is bondsman no more. With exulting heart he bears testimony—' *That* was the angel of mercy whom God sent to my soul ; and her message of love was blessed, not

only to me, but to many in my land.' The Almighty Judge puts a star into her crown ; and that feeble taper, which of old shed its trembling light in an earthly household, shines henceforth as the brightest of the firmament ;—aye, and having turned many unto righteousness, "as the stars for ever and ever."

(4.) Let us learn, as a closing lesson, to *be slow in interpreting, or rather in misinterpreting, the providence of God*. Never was providence darker, apparently, than when that young maid, nestling, as we have pictured her, in some quiet home, or, like a young gazelle, roaming in her innocence the pastoral valleys and mountains of Naphtali, was snatched away by ruffian hands in war or foray ; compelled to barter her freedom for slavery or worse, in a land and city of aliens ; her youth and sex, her tenderness and tears pleading in vain with her captors to avert so miserable a fate. Where is the Jehovah of Israel ? Can He wink at the nefarious deed ? Can He suffer villainy and wrong to triumph over goodness, purity, and truth ? Why has He left unanswered these prayers of disconso-

late Hebrew parents? Why is this Rachel left to weep for her child un comforted,—the cry of one of His own chosen flock over her stolen lamb, unheard by the ear of the Shepherd of Israel? Yes; picture the feelings of that mother as she looked down from some crag in Lebanon on the burning cottage, and saw—worse than smoke and flame—her missing child slung on the saddle-bow of some Syrian horseman, away from her sight for ever, to endure a life of drudgery, infamy, shame! How would she pray that the sods of the valley might rather cover that loved one's form; and, beating her breast in the anguish of despair, exclaim, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious, and hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?"

But, fear not, disconsolate one. Dry thy tears. The Lord is her keeper—He will give His angels charge concerning her. He has a great end to serve, which only He can discern through that smoking hamlet and those piercing cries. That flower plucked from thy bosom is to be planted by the rivers of heathen waters, to bring forth its fruit in due season, and to fill with its fragrance a heathen palace. Ay, this little censer is to scatter its

perfumes through all ages. For wheresoever this Bible is read, and this Old Testament gospel preached, there shall this which this Hebrew child hath done be told as a memorial of her !

So, are we not often led, in premature haste, to harbour guilty surmises as to the rectitude and wisdom and faithfulness of the divine procedure ? Confronted with baffling providences, the reason of which puzzles and perplexes our best ingenuity, are we not tempted at times to ask, Why these unanswered, nay, defeated prayers ?—the urgent plea not only left unheard, but responded to in the very way we most dreaded and deprecated. To take the very case suggested by the story of the captive maid. Many a mother pleads, in earnest faith and importunate supplication, that God may overrule so as to prevent her son going to some place or position of peril or temptation. How is her prayer at times answered ? Her child is sent to the distant, dreaded Damascus, instead of being continued under the happy fostering influences and salutary restraints of home. In silence and solitude, and under the bitter consciousness of frustrated wishes, she is driven to give way to the

plaintive soliloquy, "Surely my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God." So thought and reasoned an illustrious name in the roll of Christian parents—Monica, the devout mother of Augustine. He tells us in his "Confessions" that she had prayed earnestly—pleaded night and day, that the God she served would not permit her son to fulfil his own wish and intention of leaving his home and going to Italy. She too truly feared the vices and contaminations of the Roman capital. Yet her prayers were not heard. To Italy he went, and in Rome he sojourned; and the yearning heart he had left behind, could only picture, in her hours of lone agony, the moral shipwreck of all that was dearest to her. But the journey and the resort so dreaded, became to Augustine his spiritual birthplace. That city of moral darkness was made to him a Bethel for the visions of God, where he erected his life-altar, and vowed his eternal vow

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. "A man deviseth his (*own*) ways; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, *that* shall stand." Oh that we could believe that at

times the denial of our prayers may be the best—the kindest—the paternal answer to them ; that when crossed and thwarted in our aspirations after what *we* think is for our good, we are tempted to pronounce, with the patriarch, the hasty verdict—“ All these things are against me ! ”—we could trust the All-loving to guide our steps, not according to our finite and fallible wisdom, but according to the counsel of His sovereign yet gracious will. Many of His own children, like that little maid, have had to confront what was bitter and painful,—leaving the quiet nooks and valleys, for the storm-clouds of Lebanon and the stern trials of Damascus life. Let them trust their sure, unfaltering Guide, that He will bring light out of darkness ; and show that, as in her case, in an apparently adverse lot, there are undreamt-of blessings in reversion either for themselves or for others. Many is the Christian, who, in the calm retrospect of life, can tell, that either light first broke on his own clouded spirit, or messages of mercy and succour were borne to others, “ as he journeyed towards Damascus ! ”

1

IV.

The Pilgrimage.

“AND ONE WENT IN, AND TOLD HIS LORD, SAYING, THUS AND THUS SAID THE MAID THAT IS OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL. AND THE KING OF SYRIA SAID, GO TO, GO, AND I WILL SEND A LETTER UNTO THE KING OF ISRAEL. AND HE DEPARTED, AND TOOK WITH HIM TEN TALENTS OF SILVER, AND SIX THOUSAND PIECES OF GOLD, AND TEN CHANGES OF RAIMENT. AND HE BROUGHT THE LETTER TO THE KING OF ISRAEL, SAYING, NOW, WHEN THIS LETTER IS COME UNTO THEE, BEHOLD, I HAVE THEREWITH SENT NAAMAN MY SERVANT TO THEE, THAT THOU MAYEST RECOVER HIM OF HIS LEPROSY. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN THE KING OF ISRAEL HAD READ THE LETTER, THAT HE RENT HIS CLOTHES, AND SAID, AM I GOD, TO KILL AND TO MAKE ALIVE, THAT THIS MAN DOETH SEND UNTO ME TO RECOVER A MAN OF HIS LEPROSY? WHEREFORE CONSIDER, I PRAY YOU, AND SEE HOW HE SEEKETH A QUARREL AGAINST ME.”—2 KINGS V. 4-7.

The Pilgrimage.

“ WOULD God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria ! for he would recover him of his leprosy.” This artless child-utterance opens unexpectedly to the diseased and despairing hero a door of hope,—puts a new guiding-star into his midnight of darkness.

Who that has witnessed can ever forget the occasion, as relatives are gathered around some couch of sickness, where the sands of dear life are fast running out—the pulse feebly ebbing, the parched lips and languid eye proclaiming too surely that the Valley is at hand ;—when suddenly there occurs a change for the better ; the signs are observed of returning animation ; the sinking strength rallies and revives ; and anxious ears listen to the soft whisper that passes from the physician’s lips—“ *There is hope ?*” Or who that has been out in a storm at sea, the waves running

mountains high, the tempest roaring through the shrouds, the bravest and manliest abandoning themselves to blank despair;—who can ever forget that moment, when the contending elements, as if weary and worn with conflict, listen to the mandate, “Peace, be still?” Anon, the wind changes; there is a break in the troubled sky, and the helmsman, lifting his voice amid the moanings of the blast, announces the joyful tidings, “*Out of danger!*” Akin to such feelings must have been the emotions of the Syrian chief, as this young ministering angel of hope, in the guise of a domestic slave, drops these strange, mysterious, scarcely credible balm-words of comfort. And such, too, but in a far more intensified form, are the feelings of every soul, when it passes from a condition of danger and peril and death, into a state of peace and safety and life,—when, “dwelling in darkness and in the shadow of death,” it first catches up the music of that divine message—“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy!” “There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.” “Whosoever believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.” Yes; blessed be God, these

and similar declarations are addressed to every spiritual leper in this sin-stricken world ;—to all the diverse crowd in its *lazaretto* of morally diseased, whatever their circumstances or social position ; whether clothed in ermine or in rags ; whether, like Naaman, having “ the boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,” or their only birthright, that of penury. “ This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” As with the warrior of Damascus, so with them : they have a gracious “ missive,” a “ letter of commendation ” to the King of kings. There is a Greater than the greatest Prophet in Israel, who can “ recover them of their leprosy.”

We may pause for a moment to note, in the case of her master, what we have already done in the preceding chapter in connection with the story of the little captive servant, that *God works by means*. He might, if it pleased Him, perform His will and sovereign behests *immediately* ; but He does it *mediately* ; by methods, sometimes complex, sometimes simple. He might, by a verbal mandate, have demolished the walls of Jericho ; but He appointed the instrumentality of the Ark

procession, the blast of rams' horns, and the shout of the soldiers. He might at once have routed the hosts of Midian in the Valley of Jezreel ; with the breath of His mouth scattered them as chaff before the whirlwind. But He commanded His elect hero to employ the similar instrumentality of pitchers and lamps, trumpet-soundings, and battle-cry.

We may wonder, indeed, at first sight, what was the cause of so cumbrous and protracted a plan for effecting the leper's cure, as is here described to us ; what the object and necessity of preparing these chariots and horsemen, these bags of gold, and changes of raiment ; subjecting the sufferer to a long and tedious journey across the northern passes of Palestine, through the forests and villages of Naphtali and Ephraim. Why not rather send the Prophet of healing to the palace of Damascus ? or, easier still, let the Jehovah of Israel exercise His own supreme prerogative, and the glow of health would in a moment thrill through the hero's veins. As with the slave of another pagan soldier in later times, He had only to "speak the word," and he would have been made whole.

In addition, however, to its being His wonted and normal method of operation, God had special reasons, in the case of Naaman, for the employment of such varied instrumentality. He was desirous of manifesting His power in the sight of a whole people. The omnipotent utterance would have been sufficient for the leper's own cure; some delegated messenger from the upper sanctuary might easily have been sent to that solitary chamber on the mission of restoration, and the recovered warrior thus have been brought to recognise the divine sovereignty. But the Great Being, "who worketh all things after the counsel of His will," would have the captive Hebrew maid become a preacher to Naaman's nation. He would magnify His own name in the eyes of Syria,—aye, and in the eyes too of disloyal and degenerate Israel, who had been lapsing year after year into an entire apostasy. The martial cavalcade is mustered. The Aramite princes and heathen priests may laugh it to scorn;—they may smile at the credulity of their chief, thus giving heed to the sayings of a slave-girl;—selling himself, even more ignominiously than a brother chieftain of a former

age, into a female's hands (Judges iv. 9) ; but he is ere long to head that returning procession back in triumph, the mountain-passes of Hermon and Lebanon resounding with song : " This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles " (Ps. xxxiv. 6). " They cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men ! " (Ps. cvii. 13-15).

But to proceed with the verses placed at the head of this chapter.

(1.) Naaman's first impulse, before setting out on his journey, was *to go and tell his lord*—" And " (one *) " he went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel " (ver. 4). Before he can adopt the suggestion of the young Hebrew, he feels it his duty, though

* There is no authority in the original for the insertion of the word " one," implying that the information was conveyed by another : Naaman was himself the informant.

the most exalted of Benhadad's subjects, to go to his sovereign, make him acquainted with his design, and receive the royal sanction.

This reads us the preliminary lesson, regarding even the minor, ordinary, everyday details of life, to be careful in observing its proprieties and courtesies. "Be courteous,"—"Let all things be done decently and in order," are alike moral and religious obligations. No one was bolder and braver, had a loftier sense of independence or a profounder scorn of hollow conventionalities, than the Great Apostle of the Gentiles. Yet see his Christian *etiquette*, his refined and delicate consideration for the rights and feelings, it might be even prejudices of others, illustrated in that beautiful Epistle to Philemon; the epistle which has so well been designated "the letter of the Christian gentleman." Rudeness and boorishness, lack of respect for seniors and superiors, proud self-assertion and presumptuous dogmatism, especially in youth, are as much opposed to the spirit of the gospel as anger and wrath. The believer has been likened to an *anagram* which is capable of being read up and down—everyway, and in all lights.

Moreover, we believe it will generally be found that the manliest and noblest are the most courteous. It is the vulgar, the upstart, the shallow thinker, who is the self-willed and presuming,—who crosses and violates the civilities of life, and refuses to concede “honour to whom honour is due.” In the case and conduct of Naaman, whose position and antecedents might have tended to nurture other feelings, we have a pleasing instance, alike of the soldier’s chivalrous obligation of duty to his king, and the citizen’s deference to his superior, when, on the first blush of this strange pilgrimage, on so strange an errand, “he went in and told his lord.”

But is there not also a higher spiritual lesson here for the Christian in his hour of difficulty and peril? When environed with perplexing paths and providences, and at a loss which to follow, swaying between the opposing forces of inclination and duty, may he not—ought he not, like Naaman, to repair to the King of kings—“*to tell his Lord*” of what is burdening his spirit? How important before embarking, like the Syrian chief, on any arduous undertaking, deciding on

any important enterprise of life, to spread out our case before God, and bring our doubts and perplexities to the test of prayer. Let a sceptic world in these days deride and dispute, as it may, the efficacy of such petitions; those who have had personal experience in the past of the divine guidance and direction, know the blessedness of access to the Throne of Grace,—the assuring touch of the Golden Sceptre,—whether it be in deciding on a profession, or in entering on some new opening of business, or in emigrating to the distant colony, or in forming the marriage relation. They know how alike sacred is the duty, and how comforting the privilege, of repairing to the presence-chamber of the Great King in heaven, and saying, “Lord, what wilt THOU have me to do?” If others there are whose plans and purposes are unsanctioned and unsanctified by prayer—who, unlike the Father of the Faithful, pitch their tents before they pitch their altars—who enter on duties and form connections without once seeking Heaven’s blessing; those who are “taught of God” know how differently they can brace themselves for life’s journey and pilgrimage, for crossing its Hermons, traversing its

valleys of Achor and Baca, if they have listened to the inviting voice, "Come with ME from Lebanon, with ME from Lebanon." If the altar were erected first, and then the tent, how many tears and trials might afterwards be saved! Look at Lot, in his selection of the well-watered plains of Sodom. In the resolve of that moment of impulse, he took no heed—no account, of his soul's best interests. He came not to the choice direct from his bended knees. He rushed with a carnal spirit down to the rich pasture-lands and luxurious capital. And what was the result? A life of insult; mocking for himself—worldliness for his family; linked to an ungodly partner—his daughters married to the vile and degraded; his home at last a mass of charred ruins; his wife a calcined pillar; his own old age blackened with unparalleled infamy. Had he sought the Lord's will at that memorable hour, when he stood with his patriarch-uncle on the heights of the future Bethel, surveying the land he had in his choice, he might have been guided to a decision that would have rescued his name from degradation and shame. But, the divine blessing unsolicited, he

ventured on the brink of temptation,—He was “a brand” “in the burning;” the mercy of his God alone plucked him from it, and made his spiritual history—the epitaph on his tomb—to be this, “Saved, *yet so as by fire*” (1 Cor. iii. 15).

(2) Observe *Naaman's departure and journey*. “And,” we read, “he departed” (ver. 5). His promptitude, in the true soldier-spirit of instant surrender to duty—“Go, and he goeth,” is noteworthy. No sooner does he hear the proposal of the young Hebrew maid, than he immediately takes measures to reach the Prophet in Israel. There are no delays, no questionings, no procrastination. Had he given way to such, the project would in all likelihood have been rejected and abandoned. Insurmountable obstacles would have presented themselves. The length of the road; reasons of policy and state; the humiliation involved in a great Syrian warrior going to seek a boon at the hands of a Hebrew seer; the obloquy such an expedient might bring upon him among his own countrymen; more than all, the utter hopelessness of such a pilgrimage. The disease

had advanced too far ; it had baffled the best skill in Damascus ; it was known to be incurable.

But he confers neither with himself nor with others. No sooner is the possibility of a remedy mentioned, than he grasps, like a drowning man, this rope that has been unexpectedly thrown for his rescue. The proximity of the Hebrew territories must have doubtless made him familiar with the miracles accomplished by the hand of the prophets of Jehovah. He believed that what had been done in the case of others, could be done in his ; and strong in faith,—giving glory to a God yet unknown to him, save by name, this Gentile stranger leaps into his chariot, and pursues his way. We feel already sure it will be a prosperous mission. When conviction passes into resolution, and resolution still farther into action, the battle is always more than half won. As we see the train of horses, servants, and chariots winding through the passes of the Lebanon, we feel that that moral hero has already obtained his double conquest, and that we shall in due time hail him as a monument of mercy and grace.

How unlike the case of many in spiritual things ;

who stagger through unbelief; allowing solemn monition and conviction to pass unheeded—conjuring up to themselves some supposed necessity for postponement and delay;—resolving to set out on the pilgrimage at *some time*, but “*not yet*,” imagining the chariots and horses of salvation to be at their call whenever they wish, and their malignant leprosy a thing that may be safely postponed for a deathbed cure. As Naaman felt, so well may they, that restoration may be with them “now or never.”

The king said to the sufferer, “*Go to, go.*” It is thus *our* Lord speaks. This is the Great Physician’s prescription to the seeking soul, Wait not a moment; linger not in all the plain; confer not with any earthly adviser. Let the chariots be ordered. Haste thee; flee for thy life! “Go to! go!” for a long eternity is suspended on the resolve.

. And yet, while we have thus abundant reason to admire and imitate the faith and promptitude, the boldness and tenacity of purpose in this half-enlightened heathen, let us merely advert, in pass-

ing, to what will be more specially noted by and by, how hard it is for the natural man to receive the salvation of the gospel as a *free* gift. We go not in the empty chariot of faith; but we must take along with us our waggon-loads of gift and treasure to strengthen our claim, and to count as some equivalent, if not payment, for our cure. We go, as if the spiritual largess, the unbought and unpurchasable blessings of the covenant, were to be obtained with money. Our query is that of the young man in gospel story, "*What good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?*" (Matt. xix. 16). Brilliant and attractive as was the spectacle of all this gay company moving through the land of Israel, we would rather have seen Naaman sitting alone in his chariot (like the Ethiopian Treasurer of a future age), with nothing in his hand or in his scrip, but "the King's letter."

Yes; how reluctant we are to repair to the great Heavenly Healer "just as we are"—needy bankrupts and beggars in His sight—saying, "Silver and gold have I none;" talents and changes of raiment, good deeds and merits, gifts and attainments, virtues and amiabilities, I leave them all

behind me in this pilgrimage of *grace*. I come with no mental, or material, or moral bribe in my chariot, I have nothing but this *King's letter*,—this *Bible*, in which is written, as my title and passport, “The GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. vi. 23).

Naaman “departed.” In order to give vividness to the unique story, we are tempted to allow rein to imagination, and endeavour to picture, in thought, that brilliant procession as it issues forth from the western gate of Damascus;—the same gate, probably, which assumes at this day the somewhat imposing and high-sounding title of “THE GATE OF GOD.”* Conspicuous would be the chariot of the chief himself, the scythe armour now replaced by some appropriate emblem of peace. Like all eastern cavalcades (and we may well believe specially on such an occasion as this), the royal caravan would comprise a vast retinue of servants, wearing their rich turbans and striped *abdys*; litter-horses

* “*Buwdbet Ullah*.” “Through this the pilgrim caravan annually passes on its way to Mecca. It might rather be called ‘The Gate of Death,’ for hundreds of those who pass through it never return” (Porter’s “Syria and Palestine,” p. 470).

and camels and asses to convey tents and provender, with the already-mentioned gifts;—ingots and talents from the Treasure-house of the capital; and the best stuffs—"holiday suits or state dresses" of silk and camel-hair, from its looms. We may further imagine, that, as in most similar expeditions, in order to escape the intolerable midday heat, they would start at early morn, or rather while many of the brighter stars were lingering in the heavens. They have crossed the long level plain—the northern plain of the Sahara—athwart which the mists of night are still brooding, disclosing here and there the graceful tops of palm-trees, like floating islands in a lake of cloud. The sun is just beginning to light up the distant peaks of "many-headed" Lebanon, and to tip the dew-drops gemming the tangled shrubs which line the way, as we see them commencing the long ascent by the stream of Pharpar up the flanks of Hermon. If Naaman had been in the habit of listening, in his Syrian home, to some of the songs of Zion on the lips of the Hebrew captive, he might now have appropriately transferred "the traveller's psalm" to his own circumstances, as the great

border mountain rose high above them—"the tower of Lebanon which looketh towards Damascus" (Sol. Song vii. 4); "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth" (Ps. cxxi. 1, 2).

They have wound their way along the rugged steep, strewn doubtless then, as now, with fragments of black basalt; and, crossing the watershed, begin to descend by the swift torrent of the modern Hasbeya. The land of Israel is soon full in view; already their eyes fall on places associated with illustrious deeds. The old walls of Hazor, which, with their martial memories of Barak and Sisera, could not fail to be interesting to a warrior, are at their right; the plateau of Bashan is on their left; while the mountains of Naphtali and the more distant hills of Ephraim and Samaria lie between, and blend their summits with the horizon. There are spots, too, close at hand, which in future are to receive a still holier consecration. Some height among those gigantic spurs or eminences, with the winter snow still visible in the crevices, was, in a far distant age, to form the scene of an

incident of surpassing and unparalleled splendour, converting, for the time being, this "Hill of God" into the vestibule—the gate of heaven; for it was on this "high mountain apart" that the Lord of glory was in the days of His incarnation transfigured; when His face, and the very garments of those that were with Him, vied in brightness with the snow on the ridges above. As they continued their descent, the green knolls and patches of pasture-ground are interspersed here and there with gigantic forest-trees and underwood,—the haunt of the "bulls of Bashan" or the timid gazelle. They have now reached the base of the kingly mount; pausing, perhaps, as is the wont of caravans to this hour, by the gushing fountain, around which, in subsequent times, rose the palaces of Cæsarea, and where Herod, on a picturesque cliff, amid groves of olive and ilex, erected a temple to Augustus. Leaving upon their left the ancient city and sanctuary of Dan, they would skirt the reedy jungle which borders the lake of Merom (the scene of Joshua's last battle with the confederate Canaanite chiefs), tapering tufts of papyrus, mingling with thickets of

oleander and sycamore. Thence their route would lie, either along the course of the Jordan to the then secluded lake of Chinneroth (the Gennesaret of later years), or, more probably, by the great western itinerary which led through the soft undulating hills which enshrined the Refuge city of Kedesh, the sanctuary and capital of its tribe;—a city which doubtless then (as we venture from personal inspection to pronounce it now, in its desolation and ruin), must have been the most “beautiful for situation” and surroundings, among the towns of northern Palestine.

As they emerged from the park of oaks and terebinths which clothed the foot of Tabor, one place unseen, towards the right, nestling amid its green hills and oliveyards, would, to the Chief of the expedition, had he known its future, been of surpassing interest. For it was in the synagogue of NAZARETH that lips which “spake as never man spake” mentioned him by his name—“*Naaman the Syrian*” (Luke iv. 27). The Good Shepherd, whose mission was “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” there made personal reference to one of those “other sheep” not of His fold, “whom He

was also to bring," and cause to "hear His voice:"—the first fulfilment of the gracious words, "He calleth His own sheëp *by name*, and leadeth them out." "I have called thee by *thy name*, thou art mine" (John x. 3; Isa. xliii. 1).

They have now crossed the plain of Esdraelon, alike the great battlefield and granary of Palestine—the most extensive stretch of fertile land on which their eyes had rested since they left the gate of Damascus. Tabor, the Kishon, Gilboa, Jezreel, and other names familiar in Israelitish story, are around them, all bristling with warlike recollections. Similar remembrances there must have been also, though unrecorded in the sacred narrative, of scenes in which the leader of the band had been himself conspicuous. He must have been gazing on the very hill-tops which recently possessed a very different significance to him, when blazing with the watchfires of the hostile Hebrews. Strange must have been the thought, that he was now a suppliant in the very territories of those, with whom the soldiers at his side may have closed, not long before, in deadly conflict—a helpless patient and invalid, seeking the merciful aid

of a Jewish prophet ! Strange, too, must that brilliant equipage have seemed to the primitive villagers as it swept along ;—the chariot devoid of those hostile emblems with which, a short time previously, they had been so sadly familiar ; neither bowman, nor spearman, nor armour-bearer ; the servants only carrying weapons sufficient to protect the waggons which contained the regal presents—"ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten garments" (or caftans).*

But, not to indulge in further conjectural detail ; Naaman's pilgrimage has, in a higher metaphoric sense, a parallel and counterpart in the case of every true believer—the soul in its quest after God, and salvation, and peace. Various are the experiences of that journey, from the earliest hours of struggle and disquietude, when first

* The chariot, as is well known, would be a novelty to the Israelites. They were familiar with them only as used in warfare by their enemies. The only exceptions (see "Sinai and Palestine," p. 133) "were those used by Ahab and Jehu in the level plain of Esdraelon ; also in conveying royal corpses for burial to Samaria and Jerusalem (1 Kings xxii. 38 ; 2 Kings ix. 28 ; xxiii. 30). The chariot-road from Jerusalem to Gaza, traversed by the Ethiopian eunuch, would be made probably under the Roman occupation."

brought face to face with the unsolved problems of death and what is after death—when the reality and virulence of the spiritual ulcer is revealed, for which no earthly remedy is adequate;—onwards to the time, when, at the cross of Christ, and in the revelation of the Father's love in Him, feverish unrest is quieted, and the inquiry of aching spirits is answered—"What must I do to be saved?" Happy they, who in the chariot of faith have been led to undertake that momentous journey which is at last to end with the outburst of praise for "salvation found"—"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John vi. 68, 69).

(3.) Let us note *Naaman's reception*.

The journey is accomplished; the chief and his retainers have reached Samaria, the capital of Israel, situated on its steep hill; a city "which combined, in a union not elsewhere found in Palestine, strength and beauty."* Naaman sends

* "Sinai and Palestine," p. 242.

one of his troop to the palace of Jehoram with the royal letter of Benhadad. The monarch reads it. Commencing, doubtless, with the wonted oriental complimentary salutations, it continued —“ *Now, when this letter is come unto thee, behold I have therewith sent Naaman, my servant, to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.*”

The perusal leads to a burst of indignant anger. It seemed little else than an insult; an arrogant imposition on royal credulity; the studied, designed occasion of a fresh quarrel. He and his people were just recovering from the staggering blow dealt, not long since, by the hand of Benhadad. He sees in the letter only a pretext for drawing swords again, for anew ravaging his territories and deluging his valleys with blood. By the customary method of giving expression to strong emotion, Jehoram rent his clothes; and treating the proposal as the taunt of a blaspheming heathen masking his own political ends, he exclaims, “Am I God, to kill or to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.”

Alas ! will the monarch of Israel—the head and ruler of the theocratic tribes—refuse to give glory to whom, as it specially became him to testify, glory is due ? As we have already observed, Naaman could not fail to have heard of the astounding miracles which the God of the Hebrews and His prophets had performed in former as well as recent times ; how their national annals were a record of marvellous supernatural agency and deed : and if worship of the calves of Bethel had not blinded and demoralised him, the eye of Jehoram, from his kingly capital, might have lighted on more than one eminence suggestive of miraculous intervention in the past. The comparatively recent wonders wrought by the hands of the Great Tishbite might now have been vividly before him ; and when this miserable leper, the wreck of martial glory, stood in his presence, passing strange that he did not call to mind that benignant servant of the Most High, on whom Elijah's mantle and spirit had fallen ; who had power delegated to him so lately, in the case of the Shunamite's son, even to resuscitate the dead. The leper's hopes seem

in a moment to be frustrated and extinguished, his errand fruitless, his pride wounded, his journey an ignominious failure.

How often does this accord with everyday experience! Just when our worldly anticipations seem brightest—the long journey successfully terminated—the aspirations of a lifetime on the eve of accomplishment; some unexpected reverse crosses our wishes, gives the lie to all our dreams of happiness, and we are left apparently, like Naaman, to retrace our lonely way. In spiritual things, too: the way to the cross, and beyond the cross to the crown—from the gate of earth to the “Gate of God” in the true Canaan, is not all smooth. It is a *journey*, with all the vicissitudes of a pilgrimage: effort and toil; sunshine and shade; mountains of difficulty; valleys of humiliation; bright gleams and golden sunsets, alternating with sombre clouds and murky vapours; Hermon-dews of divine influence and sustaining strength, with fainting and thirst of the arid land—a treeless desert, where no water is: the marching forth with timbrel, lute, and song of praise one day; the next, encountering narrow

strait and extremity of peril ; when, like Israel, with the sea on one side and the bluff cliffs on the other, our cry is, " We are entangled, the wilderness hath shut us in ! " Yes, through what hosts of spiritual foes and obstructions that chariot of faith has to find its way :—sceptic doubts ; demon passions ; depressing and depraving worldliness ; the pride of nature ; the arrogance of reason ; the tyranny of self ; the moral weakness which cowers and vacillates under the world's frown, and dreads the world's censure—" truly, a great fight of afflictions." But, still, on the chariot moves ; and faith, imparting fresh courage, inspires the song, " O my God, my soul is cast down within me : therefore will I remember Thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of Thy waterspouts : all Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life" (Ps. xlii. 6, 7, 8). Thus does the pilgrim-soldier, hindered, but not baffled ; wounded, but not overcome ; " cast

down, but not destroyed ; " pass onwards, through all hard experiences, into the paradise of God's peace—" peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ "—" peace through the blood of the cross." We may imagine, in the case of Naaman, the conflicting feelings that burned in his breast as his faith was now thus sorely put to the test. He has allowed himself to be duped and deceived ; the toil of that journey has only mocked him in the sight of Syria and Israel ; or, what was worse, served to stir up a fresh quarrel between the rival kings. Must he now turn his horses' heads, and, sick at heart, sullen and morose, retrace his way to a dishonoured grave amid the cypresses of Damascus ? With his confidence shattered in all he had heard of Israel's God, is he to die a blinder votary than ever of the helpless Rimmon ? What is he to do ? He has come to a standstill. It is humiliation either to remain or to return. Ben-hadad has failed him—Jehoram has failed him. The lesson is anew read to that disconsolate warrior—" Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils."

But man's extremity is God's opportunity. He

who "leads the blind by a way they know not," will fulfil, in the case of this earnest seeker, His own promise—"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass: and He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. . . . Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand" (Ps. xxxvii. 5, 6, 24). There is no cause for despondency. The last word of his royal master may have sounded in his ears (as, in a spiritual sense, it ought in ours), "Go to, go!" or, like Moses' call to Israel in their moment of terror and apparent discomfiture, "Go forward!"

Yes, brave warrior! continue thy journey with undaunted soul across these Hebrew mountains. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. xxx. 5). The Sun of Righteousness will ere long arise upon thee with healing in His beams. There is one, at all events, praying in thy behalf in distant Damascus; and the effectual fervent prayer of a Hebrew slave, as well as of a righteous man, availeth much. Her prayer is to be answered. Healed in body and

restored in soul, she is yet to welcome thee back through "The Gate of God," with the new song in thy lips—"I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but He hath not given me over unto death. Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go in to them, and I will praise the Lord" (Ps. cxviii. 17-19).

V.

The Remedy and its Rejection.

“AND IT WAS SO, WHEN ELISHA THE MAN OF GOD HAD HEARD THAT THE KING OF ISRAEL HAD RENT HIS CLOTHES, THAT HE SENT TO THE KING, SAYING, WHEREFORE HAST THOU RENT THY CLOTHES? LET HIM COME NOW TO ME, AND HE SHALL KNOW THAT THERE IS A PROPHET IN ISRAEL. SO NAAMAN CAME WITH HIS HORSES AND WITH HIS CHARIOT, AND STOOD AT THE DOOR OF THE HOUSE OF ELISHA. AND ELISHA SENT A MESSENGER UNTO HIM, SAYING, GO AND WASH IN JORDAN SEVEN TIMES, AND THY FLESH SHALL COME AGAIN TO THEE, AND THOU SHALT BE CLEAN. BUT NAAMAN WAS WROTH, AND WENT AWAY, AND SAID, BEHOLD, I THOUGHT, HE WILL SURELY COME OUT TO ME, AND STAND, AND CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD HIS GOD, AND STRIKE HIS HAND OVER THE PLACE, AND RECOVER THE LEPER. ARE NOT ABANA AND PHARPAR, RIVERS OF DAMASCUS, BETTER THAN ALL THE WATERS OF ISRAEL? MAY I NOT WASH IN THEM, AND BE CLEAN? SO HE TURNED, AND WENT AWAY IN A RAGE.”—2 KINGS V. 8-12.

The Remedy and its Rejection.

IN some lowly dwelling, situated nigh the forest of palms by the banks of the Jordan, near Jericho, the great Prophet and Seer of the times was at present sojourning. The character of Elisha presented a marked contrast to that of his distinguished predecessor. Elijah was bold, stern, impetuous;—his life and mission had their appropriate emblem in the earthquake and tempest and flame, on which he gazed from the mouth of his cave in Horeb; even the signal close of his existence was in keeping with his previous history—swept to heaven in a whirlwind, with horses and chariots of fire. The life of his successor, again, was symbolised by “the still, small voice” which succeeded the other manifestations of the divine Presence. The one has been well called the Peter, the other the John, of the prophetic age. The soul of Elisha, however, like all true and noble natures, was stirred

to its depths by any infraction on the honour of his God. Gentle as a lamb in his daily walk and conversation, when the name and glory of the Great Being he served were at stake, this righteous man was bold as a lion.

The journey to Palestine of the warrior of Syria was of too much importance and interest to have its fame confined to Samaria. A rumour of the pilgrimage of the illustrious Aramite had reached the forest-home of the prophet. It may possibly be, he had learnt the purport of Naaman's mission by express communication from heaven; as also, that Jehoram, who ought to have known that there was alike a God and a prophet in Israel, had only in a fit of unworthy petulance and passion rent his clothes, and put the final extinguisher on the Gentile's cherished hopes.

Elisha cannot brook the insult done to Jehovah. Unless prompt measures are taken, the disappointed soldier may return in sorrow and despair to his heathen land more idolater than ever, and the innocent Hebrew slave may have to pay the forfeiture of her young life for her rash and unavailing counsels. Many of the world's

gigantic wars have been born of trifles. Many battlefields have sprung from alleged petty wrongs—"injured sensibilities." May not all Syria, in the present case, be roused into new conflict to resent the indignity offered to her hero? Independent, however, of this, it is enough for the Man of God to hear, that there is a soul at unrest—a sufferer who has come so many leagues from his home, seeking that succour which his own deities were impotent to afford. Accordingly, a messenger (probably Gehazi, or one of the young men of the School of the prophets) is despatched to the Palace of Samaria, with a message to the Israeli-tish monarch, saying, "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel!" Noble is the attitude and bearing of Elisha; he speaks God's word before kings, and is not ashamed; nay, he ventures to withstand his anointed monarch to the face, because he was to be blamed. All the magicians and soothsayers and physicians of Syria had been unable to render aid to the leper. But this humble man, in his quiet retreat amid the jungles of the Jordan, stands forth like another

Daniel to interpret the dream, and to magnify the power of "the most High God, who ruleth in the kingdom of men."

Nor can we fail at this point to admire the conduct of Naaman, considering his constitutional impatience. Baffled and duped and crest-fallen, with his pride stung to the quick, we might have expected that the peremptory mandate of a Jewish Seer would have been received with disdain; that he would have turned at once, and retraced his steps to his Damascus home. 'If the king of Israel' (so we may imagine the soliloquy of the injured Chief) 'gives me such poor encouragement, and vilifies the letter of my royal master, what am I to expect from the Teacher of Gilgal?' He wisely, however, muffles his inward feelings of irritation and wounded vanity. "Skin for skin; all that a man hath will he give for his life." This abject sufferer is not to be deterred in the prosecution of his pilgrimage by a first discouraging reception. The utterances of the Hebrew slave outlive the chilling words which dropped in his ear from the throne at Samaria. He resolves forthwith to repair to the Prophet's home.

Accordingly, in the next incident of the story, we see him setting out thither, with his horses and servants and chariot.

He reads, in this, a needful lesson and rebuke to us, alike with regard to earthly and spiritual concerns. Is it the lower and more subordinate earthly view? How many an important position in life has been forfeited by injured pride, or paltry wavering and irresolution. One step more, and the goal would have been reached. But a fit of passion, a momentary yielding to hesitancy or selfishness, a morbid dread of the world's censure, or even, it may be, a feeling of mistaken duty or false sentiment, has lost the one golden opportunity, and there is found no place of repentance, though it be sought carefully with tears. So too in spiritual things. By reason of doubts and misgivings—fightings within, and adverse providences without—how many are like the disciples of old, who, on listening to what appeared to them the Master's "hard sayings," "from that time walked no more with Him" (John vi. 66); like the children of Ephraim, "armed and carrying bows," yet turning recreant in the day of battle; putting their hand to the

plough, yet looking back, they have this verdict pronounced by unerring lips on their tergiversation—"Unfit for the kingdom of God." Naaman, and those who inherit in its higher, diviner sense, Naaman's spirit, are at this juncture of his story like the Magi of old, who, though they lost for a while their guiding-star, still journeyed on, assured it would again gladden them with its radiance. It did reappear; and "when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." In the case of the Syrian hero, and in the case of all, who, to withstand in "the evil day," have taken to themselves "the whole armour of God," the gracious promise is fulfilled—"Wait on the Lord, be of courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart."

Nor was it Naaman alone, whose heart was strengthened in the present emergency. Elisha, in his own case, and as the type and representative of all God's faithful ambassadors in every age, would receive fresh encouragement and heart-cheer in the prosecution of his life-labours. He had sent the authoritative direction (of which we have spoken) from his dwelling at Gilgal. But

with all his apparent boldness and magnanimity, he must have had his own secret misgivings as to how it would be received. In all likelihood, laughed to scorn, or treated with contemptuous silence, he would retire to his solitary chamber to utter, through discouraging tears, the complaint of many before and since—"Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Little do ministers of the gospel know, when often, in the weakness of their own faith, they may have rushed to the hasty inference that their words are not received, and their work is not prospering; when their hands are hanging down, and their knees are feeble, because no visible response comes to their message,—little do they know the Naamans there may be—anxious, perplexed, fevered spirits,—who, all in earnest about their souls and heaven, are anxiously listening for needed guidance in their search of the healing waters.

Nothing is told regarding the particulars of the journey to Gilgal. We are left to surmise, that after leaving the beautiful capital of Samaria, with its vine and olive-clad terraces, the cavalcade would probably sweep along the valley flanked by

the memorable slopes of Ebal and Gerizim, where another son of Damascus — old Eliezer — had, centuries before, encamped with his master under “the Terebinths of Moreh.” If the leper-chief had passed the mouth of that valley nine hundred years later, he would have listened, from the lips of a Greater than Hebrew prophet, to words that would have exactly met his case—“If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water” (John iv. 10). Continuing, possibly, by Bethel, with its dream-memories, they would proceed down the long descent of Ai and Michmash among the mountains of Benjamin,—the defile which is known by the modern name of the Wady Suweinit, now comparatively bare — then covered with a dense forest; and at the time that Naaman passed, doubtless associated with the recent terrible assault, made on the mocking youths of Bethel, by the bears which roamed its thickets. In due time they would reach the north-eastern side of the extensive palm-forest adjoining the old “City of Palms.” There Gilgal stood, on a rising ground

or 'swell;' * and, surrounded with this sylvan sanctuary, looked down, five miles distant, on the waters of the Jordan. No difficulty would be experienced in finding the lowly home of the Prophet. His name, in all that region, was familiar as a household word. Specially would it be held in grateful remembrance in connection with the spring, which, as "the Fountain of Elisha," bubbles up to this day fresh and clear; the healing of whose waters, by his miraculous agency, conferred so inestimable a boon on the dwellers in that sultry plain.

"So Naaman," we read (ver. 9), "came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha."

What was the reception accorded to him? We expect, from all we know of the gentleness and goodness of Elisha's character, that he will not be wanting in politeness or civility, to the Syrian noble. We expect to find him on the outlook for the distinguished stranger; ready to receive him with that honour, to whom (from his rank) honour was due. In the immediately preceding incident

* See Stanley, "*Syria and Palestine*," p. 307.

in the Prophet's history, when he observed, in the distance, the Shunammite approaching his other home at Mount Carmel, he was not contented with patiently waiting her arrival. He hastened to meet her; and not being so swift of foot as his servant Gehazi, he gave him instructions to run with all speed, and to inquire, "Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?" (2 Kings iv. 26).

But where is Gehazi now? There is neither appearance of prophet, nor of prophet's servant, nor of prophet's son, coming through the glades of the forest to do homage to the great captain of the armies of Damascus. The troop is allowed to wend its way unnoticed up the gentle slope which was crowned by the seer's house. Moreover, when they do arrive, the Prophet does not personally appear. He contents himself with sending what, at first, seems an uncourteous message by the lips of another. Never, doubtless, had the car of that warrior been similarly welcomed at the gates of castle or palace, much less at the door of a lowly cottage.

We may well believe there was a reason for

this. We repeat, we may feel assured that when one of the great men of the earth stood at his door surrounded with a stately retinue, Elisha, both as a citizen and as a prophet, would not, by lack of deference to one of eminent rank and position, have wantonly violated alike a social obligation and a divine ordinance. What, then, it may be asked, was the cause of the unceremonious message and reception?

We answer, first of all, the Seer may probably have felt (to use a common but expressive phrase) that there were times for everything. All this pomp and circumstance might have been appropriate enough for a season of jubilee—for the ovation of a conqueror; but it was unseemly and unsuitable for the present occasion, that a miserable leper should come decked out in the trappings of state. It would have been more befitting to ask an audience with dust on his head, and sack-cloth on his loins. Further, Naaman perhaps undertook, and now was completing, his pilgrimage, under the impression that his rank and fame and renown, backed up with that waggon-load of costly gifts and treasure, gave him an irresistible

claim on the services of the Prophet, and on the Prophet's God. He came to Gilgal, more with the feeling that he was honouring Elisha by allowing him to effect his cure, than cherishing emotions of gratitude in anticipation of the healing he expected to receive at his hands. "What!" (might be his thought, as he alighted at the modest doorway), "is it the inmate of such a dwelling as this, that is to restore me? Verily, it will be the proudest deed of his life!" The man of God was not one of those obsequious, subservient spirits who would barter principle or duty by a base truckling for favour. If he had been a fawning sycophant of the world, influenced by the common weaknesses and frailties of a weak nature, he would have gone forth from his cottage, bending before the imperial chariot. He would have condoned the warrior's pride and supercilious bearing; and overlooking the untimely and ostentatious display of splendour, would have said, "Behold thy lowly servant, O Naaman! Speak thy will, and it shall be done." His conduct, however, was regulated by the sublime maxim, which, in future ages, moulded

and swayed a greater than Elisha—that if he pleased man, he was not worthy to be called the servant of his Lord. He would have the princely petitioner at his gate to know, and would teach us also, that, in the Divine sight, every human creature occupies spiritually the same humiliating level,—that in matters which concern the soul, God is “no respecter of persons.”

The first and the last lesson of the gospel is *humility*. In every shape, and under every phase and guise, “God resisteth the proud.” It is the saying of the Redeemer Himself, “Except ye become *as little children*, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

By this reticence, with its tacit reproof, the Prophet would further tell, that “the kingdom of God cometh not with observation.” “The battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood.” Earthly conquests are marked by pomp and parade, with floating banner and flourish of trumpet and beat of drum. But the moral world has been turned upside down (ay, the little world of thought and feeling within every individual bosom), is regenerated and revolutionised

—by what ? By means of an ancient Book written by vinedressers and herdsmen, fishermen and publicans ; or rather, by the secret, remedial influence of a great principle which that Book unfolds. The Jewish Temple which crowned the summit of Moriah, rose in mysterious silence—"There was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, heard in the house while it was in building" (1 Kings vi. 7). The Church of Christ, God's living Temple, is not reared amid noise and pomp and plaudits. It is not dependent on wealth, or grandeur, or eloquence ; on pride of rank, dazzling ritual, force of intellect and parade of learning—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts" (Zech. iv. 6). "The Lord is in His holy Temple ; let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Hab. ii. 20).

But to pass to the next point which claims our attention in the narrative. Let us listen to Elisha's *message*—"Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean."

There is the gospel—the gospel message, the

gospel remedy—"Go, wash." Unto every spiritual leper we are empowered and commissioned to echo the words of the Prophet. Yes, and to add the sure promise, the glorious sequel and certainty, "And thou *shalt* be clean." It is not the word of man, it is the declaration and assurance of God Himself.

Observe these two things regarding Elisha's directions for cure.

(1.) It was a *simple* method. Nothing surely could be *more* so. The Jordan was seen flowing amid its reeds willows and oleanders, less than two leagues from the prophet's door ; a brief hour would have completed the sevenfold ablution. Nor was this repeated washing anything strange and uncommon to Naaman. As an Oriental, he was accustomed to it every day in Syria. Copious marble baths and fountains, fed from the streams of Lebanon, formed the adjuncts of every dwelling ; much more so of a palatial home like his.

(2.) It was a cure that *involved no labour*. It demanded no bodily austerities, no mental torture, no material penalty. Not a mule or camel need be unladen of its burden ; not a bag need be opened ;

not a robe shaken from its folds. "*Go and wash*"—that is all! Who does not expect to see and hear the leper, in the ecstasy of the hour, first invoking blessings on the head of the Prophet, and then, calling to his charioteer—"Lose not a moment! give rein to the horses! Slack not their speed till you get to the banks of the Jordan! Israel's God helping me, this night, ere the sun set on the hills of Benjamin, I shall be myself again, and on my way back to Damascus with a new song on my lips." With the swiftness of another Jehu, the son of Nimshi, we are prepared to see the impatient soldier driving impetuously down the gentle declivity to the river's brink.

"*But*" (ver. 11) "Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper."

We have had chiefly cause to admire the Syrian hitherto. Up to this point we can even make allowance for his weaknesses and foibles, considering he was an idolater, taking into account also other extenuating circumstances. But we must

now alter and modify our verdict. Poor human nature, unexpectedly, but too truthfully, reveals itself. Those infirmities are dragged to light which are the same in all countries, and under every variety of skin. He feels himself an injured man. He had expected that the Prophet would have come forth from his dwelling with dignified mien ; that, after the manner of an Oriental magician or sorcerer, he would "wave his hand" (or enchanter's rod), pronouncing a series of cabalistic words, calling upon the God of the Hebrews in some such imposing manner as doubtless he heard Elijah had done upon the heights of Carmel, on the occasion of the discomfiture of Baal's prophets. And then, if any direction had been given, or any miracle wrought, he supposed it would be something on a great scale—something involving vast agency, startling and overpowering in its accompaniments and effects. To employ the graphic description of Krummacher—"He expected that the commencement would be made with a variety of formalities and strange phenomena ; that then the wonder-worker would appear arrayed in an unwonted habit, and with an awe-inspiring countenance, his

gestures mysterious and awful, his steps measured, his movements solemn and enigmatical, many dark sayings and proverbs in his mouth, and in his right hand a staff, a golden censer, or something of the kind. Then, after having drawn a magic circle, that he would proceed to conjure invisible things, call upon the name of God, and that finally there would be a manipulation of the leprous person in a solemn manner, a majestic imposition of hands, a significant touching of the wounds and ulcers, and such-like imposing and fantastic ceremonies. Such was the kind of fanciful image that presented itself to Naaman's soul."

But, when the simple washing seven times in Jordan was all that was mentioned, he started back in wonder, his eye flashing with resentment at the supposed insult. "What!" we may imagine were his thoughts, if not his words, "dare he thus speak to *me*, a Patrician of the Syrian court, the idol of my army, the confidential adviser of my sovereign? Dare he offer me a gratuitous affront by so beggarly a prescription? I came thinking this to be a land of miracles, where the heavens were opened, and angels tra-

velled up and down on celestial ladders, and chariots of fire were seen on its mountain-sides. But I am befooled. I was sent first to the King : he took my letter as the pretext for a fresh quarrel. I come now to his Prophet : he has not the civility even to receive me at the door of his dwelling. When he sends his servant to me, it is with the child's message, to go and wash this leprosied body in yonder foul Jordan—which I could do, better far, at home, in Abana and Pharpar. I have been foiled, cajoled, and hoodwinked ; made the butt for both nations' scorn ; tossed like a broken reed on the waters !" Thus saying, he beckoned his charioteer to turn the horses' heads, " and he went away in a rage."

How difficult for many to be humbled even under the severest dispensations of providence ! Sickness, leprosy, bereavement, do not of themselves necessarily soften the heart, and lead with the teachableness of children to the acknowledgment of no way and will but the divine. Sad it is when the effect of these is the reverse,—to sour the temper, and to foster pride, murmuring, and rebellion. It is the Holy Ghost alone who can curb the way-

ward spirit, mould the stubborn will, and bring us to sit in filial submission at the feet of our Great Master. It is evident that Naaman had settled in his own mind the manner in which his cure was to be effected. The Prophet's method was far too ordinary and commonplace. He would himself have liked some participation in the remedy. And as to the particular direction regarding the *Jordan* immersion, his eye falls on the turgid river wending through mudbanks in the valley below, and then his memory reverts to the pure, pellucid, crystalline streams murmuring amid the groves and avenues of Damascus. "If I wash at all," he says, "I shall do it in my native golden rivers. This despicable Hebrew one shall not have the glory of my restoration."

Is not the feeling of Naaman, and the offence of Naaman, the "offence" of the gospel still? To the pride of the carnal heart, it is too simple a thing to be saved *by faith*,—to be indebted from first to last, for our eternal weal, to the doing and dying of Another. And then it is an *unlaboured* cure. The self-righteous legal spirit *will* cleave, if possible, to the old terms of "*work and win*." Human nature,

(as we had occasion to observe in the preceding chapter in connection with Naaman's gifts) desiderates something of its own, wherewith to enforce and substantiate its claim on the divine favour—prayers, virtues, self-denials, charities, almsdeeds. As in the case of the Roman Catholic, or Moham-medan, or Pagan devotees (for the principle is the same, despite of all creed diversities), there is a desire for the performance either of some great achievements or of some painful austerities. Let it be the trumpet of chivalry summoning crusaders to wrest the Lord's tomb from the hand of the infidel : let it be a pilgrimage to Mecca with bare and bleeding feet, over hot, burning sands : let it be the votaries of Brahmah, or Vishnu, or Kali, holding up their arms till these become rigid and withered in their sockets : let it be a lonely existence of mortification in monastery or hermit's cell, severed and secluded from the amenities of life : let it be the bestowment of manifold goods to feed the poor, casting with lavish hand golden gifts into God's treasury—it matters not. The longing and ambition with many is—instead of presenting the true “King's letter,” signed and sealed with the King's

own signet, and having these gratuitous contents —“ By grace are ye saved, through faith ; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God ”—to be able at last to knock at the gate of heaven with a chariot-load of good works and merits, and, pointing to them, to say, “ Behold, Lord, what I have done to purchase and secure my crown ! ” Yes, we repeat, how hard it is to strip away all pleas of self-righteousness, to disown all creature-confidences, all “ deeds of law ; ”—to ignore in thought as well as word the utterance of the presumptuous pleader in the Temple of old—“ God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are ! ” and to come as needy beggars to the foot of the cross, saying, in the words of our best-known hymn—

“ Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law’s demands ;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone,—
Thou must save, and Thou alone.”

Whoever you be whose eyes fall on these pages ; —old or young, rich or poor, convicted of many sins or few sins, we have but one prescription—“ *Go and wash* ”—“ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,

and thou shalt be saved." Mix up nothing of your own with His. Abana and Pharpar are rivers, but not *the* river. It is very notable that though the directions to Naaman were simple, they were precise, stringent. He was to wash in Jordan ; and then he was to wash, not five times, or eight times, but *seven* times. There is but *one* way—God's gospel way, *the* specific way, the revealed way, and "neither is there salvation in any other." See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. See that ye perish not, with safety in view. This Syrian was within sight of healing ; yet, in the rash pride of his heart, he was about to forfeit his only remaining chance of cure. The divine word was sounding in his ears, the waters of Jordan were gleaming before his eyes ; yet, by one heedless, impetuous resolve, he was on the point of forfeiting all the good of his long pilgrimage,—ready to turn his back on a proffered favour, and to rush to a leper's grave in a heathen land. How many have their too truthful portraiture reflected in his ! By manifold ways, and through manifold instrumentalities, in this Christian realm ; by press and by pulpit, by the living voice and by the silent

volume, they have the streams of salvation pointed out to them—aye, flowing at their side. They are “almost persuaded to be Christians;” but by reason of pride and self-righteousness and guilty procrastination, they reject the offered mercy, and lapse into their old self-complacency and indifference. Reversing the direction of the chariot, and flinging the reins loose on the coursers’ necks, their sad history is thus briefly chronicled—“The way of peace they have not known;” “Thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Rom. iii. 17; Luke xix. 44).

It is, moreover, a mournful reflection, how small and insignificant are often the causes which lead those of fair promise to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience. It is sad enough the wreck of the noble vessel, wrestling with the storm far out in the trough of the sea; but it is sadder still, to see it go down within sight of the harbour, when the voices can be heard on shore answering to the signals of distress. It was sad, of old, for the manslayer to be overtaken by the avenger of blood on his way to the Refuge-city, but sadder still to be cut down, just as he was within shadow of the

gate, and the citizens were crowding the walls cheering on his lagging and wearied steps. Reader, take home the solemn admonition, "Beware lest ye also, being carried away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found ; call ye upon Him while He is near." "If thou seek Him, He will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever !"

VI.

Man's Thoughts and God's Thoughts.

"BEHOLD, I THOUGHT."—2 KINGS V. 11.

Man's Thoughts and God's Thoughts.

IN the preceding pages, we have described Naaman's journey from Damascus, his discouraging reception by the King of Israel, the message sent from Elisha which brought him with his chariot, horses, and servants to Gilgal, and his haughty rejection of the cure propounded to him by the prophet.

Ere we pass to consider other historical incidents in the sequel, the three simple words which are placed at the head of this chapter arrest our attention. The lips of the Syrian captain were not the only ones that have uttered them. They are, it is to be feared, a formula used by thousands and tens of thousands among ourselves. Let us suspend, for a little, the thread of the narrative ; and, standing in imagination by that lowly door on the heights of Jericho, gather a few solemn reflections from the exclamation of the leper-chief —“ *Behold, I thought !*”

(1.) How often are these words employed with regard to *the dealings of Providence*. In the midst of mysterious dispensations which befall us, whether as individuals or as communities, how apt are we to impugn the Almighty's faithfulness, question the wisdom of His procedure, and set up our wills in opposition to the divine. Is not this oftentimes the silent utterance of the misgiving heart,—“Behold, I thought”—it were better had such an event been ordered otherwise? “Behold” (to take no unfrequent illustration, in which not personal interests but the welfare of the Church seems involved), here was an honoured Ambassador of Christ, a faithful witness of the truth, unwearied in his endeavours to awaken the careless, comfort the mourner, soothe the suffering, and befriend the dying. Though others might be arrested in the midst of health, and laid on couches of languishing, “I thought,” that for the world's good, and the glory of the Master he served, a rampart of defence would have been thrown around a life of earnest love and zeal and unselfishness like this! Yet while other weaklings and “Ready-to-halts” are spared, this standard-

bearer—this Asahel, swift of foot and daring in deed, has fallen in the field, just when his courage and heroism and example were most needed to nerve his comrades and turn the tide of battle. Many decayed, gnarled trunks are left to occupy their place in the forest, while the strong of stem, and green of leaf, and majestic in shadow, are rooted up. Old crumbling pillars are suffered to remain, while polished shafts, fresh from the quarry, have been struck and shivered with lightning. Where is He who guides with unerring rectitude the destinies of the universe? “Hath God forgotten to be gracious?” “Surely the Lord doth not see, neither doth the God of Israel regard!”

Or, to take the case which comes most deeply home to the individual heart, where is the mercy or tenderness in that sudden vanishing of life's summer dream—that rude demolition of the most cherished vision of earthly bliss? “Behold, I thought” that His dealings to His own, were those of a Father; not retributive and judicial, but paternal;—that I could see no hand and hear no lullaby but love. Why has the promised parental solicitude been superseded by the harsh voice and the

rebuking rod? Why has the All-loving belied His own saying, "As one whom his mother comforteth." "Doubtless Thou art our Father. . . . Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting. . . . Where is Thy zeal and Thy strength, the sounding of Thy bowels and of Thy mercies toward me? are they restrained?" (Isa. lxiii. 15, 16).

What is the answer to these and suchlike unworthy surmisings? "*My thoughts* are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isa. lv. 8). To the eye of sense, however baffling and mysterious be the ways of the Supreme Disposer, it is not for us to "think," but to believe; not to question, but, like Job, to kneel and to adore: not to say, "Behold, I *thought*" that Thy judgments are right, and I have been deceived; but, I *know* that they are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me: not, "I *thought*" that "all things are working together for good;" but, "I *know*" they are so. If we allowed our own shortsighted wisdom to sit in judgment on the divine procedure, each one of us would at times be a Naaman, tempted to turn away in sullen

discontent and anger from many, a providential message. The disciples on their way to Emmaus were cherishing such a spirit. With their back to their Lord's cross, and their faces bent on the ground, they muttered in despair, "We trusted ('behold, we *thought*') it had been He that should have redeemed Israel." Little did they dream, amid these pensive musings and carnal reasonings, that the Messiah of their nation and of the world was walking by their side. Martha and Mary were cherishing such a spirit, when they rushed to the uplands of Bethany and gazed with wistful eye across to the Moab mountains, "as to a world beyond the grave," for a tarrying Lord. If their inmost souls had been disclosed—if we could have listened to their *words*, we should have heard them thus pouring out their disconsolate soliloquy—"Behold, we thought" He would not so have lingered; we thought His omniscient eye and omnipotent love would have discerned and pitied our tempest-tossed bark in its sea of sorrows. It is unlike His kind heart thus to mock our grief. It is unlike His righteous wisdom thus to single out His and our loved brother for a premature grave. "Be-

hold, we thought" that, darkened and desolate as other homes in Judea might be, the last light He would have extinguished would be that in the Bethany dwelling—the last star expunged from the firmament, one so bright with promise.' Nay, hush, unbelieving one, thy THOUGHTS; "Said I not unto thee, if thou wouldst BELIEVE, thou shouldst see the glory of God?"

Oh for an unquestioning faith! Naaman "thought" when, in the circumstances, he had no right to think; when alike his privilege and his duty was to listen to and obey the voice of Jehovah's prophet. So ought it to be with us; not venturing to arraign the faithfulness and love even of dispensations the most inscrutable; but rather, in reverent submission to say, amid crossed wills and frowning providences, "I will hear what God the Lord will speak. He will speak peace to His people and to His saints."

(2.) But these three brief words admit of more solemn interpretation, and more solemn lessons still, if we connect them with the sinner and with an eternal world; or, rather, with that Great day

when God's mundane providential government,—the season of probation being ended, He shall judge the world in righteousness, and apportion everlasting awards ; rendering “to every man according to his deeds : to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality,—eternal life ; but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness,—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.” If we can dare, at such a crisis of the spirit's history, to suppose a remonstrance, would it not be framed or prefaced by this—“*BEHOLD, I THOUGHT?*”

Let us anticipate the scene. Let us conjure up some of those “thoughts” which, up to that moment, may have deluded and deceived, but which will then dissolve like a rope of sand.

“*Behold, I thought,*” we may suppose one to say, “*that I was as good as my neighbours.*” I saw no reason for curbing passion and leading an overstrict life. I brought myself to regard the tendencies and vices of a corrupt nature as pardonable weaknesses, too readily crediting the con-

doing verdict of my fellows, as they laughed at my scruples, and told me that there was no great harm after all in indulging these failings and foibles—that I was but a child of Adam at the best, and that no perfection was to be looked for here. If I were selfish and worldly, or the victim of lawless appetites, I thought I was at least no worse than crowds of loveless, narrow-minded, depraved souls around me, who had no higher law dominating their actions than this—“All seek their own.” I was satisfied with conforming to the conventional habits and tastes and maxims prevalent in the society among which my lot was cast. Associating religion with cypress and sackcloth, self-denial and gloom, I shook off the incubus, and came to glory in my imagined freedom, trusting—“thinking”—that all would go well with me at the last.

And is not this the very dream which many are daily cherishing—the false and fatal casuistry which is luring them to destruction? They are content to measure themselves by themselves, and to compare themselves among themselves. With blunted moral sensibilities, and confounding moral distinc-

tions, they invoke upon themselves the doom of the prophet—"Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness!" Their lives are regulated and their characters moulded by the principles and practice of the world around them. In the quaint words of an old writer, "they set their souls by the town clock, and not by the sun in the heavens." Their creed is, "Religion may be well enough in its way, but we must keep it in its own place;" and they remand it, as an interloper, into the poorest and meanest corner of their daily life. They hear its warnings as they listen to some funeral bell tolled on rare occasions. Flippant pleasure, keen money-making, unrighteous mammon, seductive vice; these are the guests to whom they throw open house and hall, while the other is treated as the mendicant at their doors, to whom they toss a coin to get rid of intrusive importunity. "Why"—we may interpret their inward musing—"why this grim strictness, this puritanical punctilio about the moralities of life? A generous and lenient allowance must be made, and will be made, at the last, for constitutional frailty and passionate im-

pulse. If betrayed into deflexions from the path of duty and rectitude—if the TEKEL of the old palace-wall be written on the chambers of conscience, it is the motto which belongs to millions as well as we. We have looked behind the world's hollow pretences and gilded professions, and our comfort is, that we are at all events not worse than the average specimens of frail humanity. Let others, if they please, dwell within curtains of sackcloth and in the tents of Mesech; be it ours to fill the luscious bowl of pleasure;—with the old Epicurean, to “live while we live;”—to enjoy life's capricious sun while it shines—the haunt of folly, the glare of footlights, the jovial song, the sparkling wine-cup. “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.”

Should there be one whose eye traces these lines, who may be harbouring, even in a modified form, such perilous fallacies, trusting to such refuges of lies,—risking the bridging of the eternal abyss with a few planks thus rotten and worthless,—tempted to say, with multitudes of self-deceived, “Behold, I THOUGHT I was standing all secure.” My brother! take home to thyself this timeous

word of warning—"When thou **THINKEST** thou standest, take heed lest thou fall." "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Eccles. xi. 9).

Let us again take our place amid the congregation at the Great Assize. Another, we may suppose, will then be ready to say, "Behold, I thought" *I might with safety procrastinate*. I thought I could presume on a strong pulse and vigorous arm and unwrinkled brow. I thought I had a long future yet to build upon; not an autumn-tint seemed to be on the leaf; the sun was yet far from the western sky; I was floating down the stream with arms folded, apparently secure in my bark, little imagining that the cata-ract was at hand. I was convinced of my folly, when I found myself suddenly in the swirl and vortex of the dark waters. I am here to bear awful testimony to the truth often listened to, but listened to in vain, that "as men live, so do men die!"

And is not this, too, the daily reasoning of multitudes? Procrastinator! if the hand of death were now to arrest you; if you were now to be laid on the pillow from which you are never again to rise,—the dream of life, with all its vanities and hopes and schemes vanishing in an instant, what would you say? Would it not be, “*Behold, I thought*” it was yet time enough; I never anticipated a summons so sudden as this. True, the unsparing monitor and messenger visited other doors;—the gloomy funeral-crowd I saw passing along the street, ought daily to have reminded me of my own certain mortality. But I did not expect the fatal rider would so soon rein up his steed at my own dwelling. My golden castles were not completed; my fields were not yet added to. I was weaving for the future, endless purposes regarding a religious life: but death has come when I was all unprepared and unready; like the leap of the forked lightning, or as the lurking assassin. Oh! I never dreamt of this rush and inroad of “the thief in the night!” “Behold, I thought”—— and the voice fails and falters; it cannot complete the sentence. The arrowy spirit

from the region of *thought*, passes at a bound into the region and world of dread realities.

Why, it may be asked, revert so often to this unwelcome theme of the peril of postponement? Just because it forms the submerged rock that has strewn the sea of life with more of mournful wrecks than any other. Every returning Lord's-day, sermons in thousands of British churches are preached, in which the danger of delay is made special subject of faithful monition,—God's servants enforcing the abstract lesson by instances in their own experience,—strong frames prostrated, gleaming eyes dimmed, young voices silenced, the boom of the great billows thus brought solemnly and impressively near. Yet what is the effect? Awed into solemnity while the message is delivered and the warning brought home, how many go away worldly and callous, neglectful and godless as ever! To-morrow finds the impressive exhortation stifled and overborne in the hum of business, just as if it had never been spoken; or, if it do recur, the old soliloquy will recur along with it, and hush it into new oblivion—"Soul, thou hast goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry."

Moreover, what often tends to foster procrastination in the case of such, is, that the crude "thought" and theory of the spiritual life which they entertain, is a false and defective one. That "thought" not unfrequently shapes itself into a religion composed of something external to themselves,—consisting in a series of outward impersonal acts; or, to express it differently, enrolment in a spiritual society called "the Church,"—that enrolment involving little more than subscription to a few doctrinal truths and formulas,—a mechanical process which can be satisfactorily effected at any time; thus leading to rest in the comforting anticipation of what is called "a deathbed repentance,"—a safe and ready *viaticum* into a world of spirits, aided by priestly absolution and the supposed efficacy of sacramental grace.

We dare not limit the power and sovereignty of divine grace, even at the close of a misspent life. Doubtless it is a possible thing for a soul (like the seer's predicted nation) to be "born in a day;"—for the spiritually blind, like our own globe emerging from its enshrouding chaos, to be translated at once out of darkness into marvellous

light. But not so is God's wonted and normal method of procedure. Moreover, if there be one truth more than another, for which we are indebted to the teachings of the better side of what falsely arrogates to itself the name of "the new theology," it is this: that religion is an *education*—the outcome of a *life*. The Pauline saint is not he, who, a stranger to all spiritual progress and development, is content with being fenced round with orthodox articles of faith, unimpeachable dogma and rubric; but rather, who has set before him, as his grand object and goal, conformity to the divine character, assimilation to the divine image. The rude and shapeless block, as it comes fresh from the quarry, is not fashioned and transformed, by a touch, for its place in the heavenly temple. Only after laborious efforts in the workman's hands, is it fitted to be a corner-stone, "polished after the similitude of a palace." A day of solemn reckoning will wake up many to the consciousness of present self-deception, who are now cherishing the delusion that they can safely and indefinitely relegate to a dying hour the work of soul preparation,—in other words, the remoulding and recon-

struction of their spiritual character—and by the muttering of a confession at life's close, pass at once into the fruition of a holy heaven and a holy God. True it is (we cannot too oft reiterate the cheering truth), that the unlimited invitation is given, irrespective of all times, unhampered by all conditions—"Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." True it is, the faithful trader even on one talent, will not be excluded from the promised recompense of the Great Creditor. The hired labourers of the eleventh hour will not be forgotten or disowned by the Lord of the vineyard. True also it is, that in the Father's house there are many mansions. There are those who are "least" as well as "greatest" in the kingdom; those who are to move in distant orbits, as well as those who are to bask in the near radiance of the Central Sun: aye more, we doubt not many a prodigal, on whom we may have uttered our harsh verdict of exclusion, will find his way to the paternal halls, and be hailed with the paternal welcome. But yet, nevertheless, neither dare we fail to remember the words of "Him that is holy, Him that is true; who openeth and no man shutteth, and

shutteth and no man openeth." Listen to them! In the blaze of that righteous tribunal they will flash condemnation on many daring and presumptuous ones—"Him that *overcometh* will I grant to sit with me on my throne:" "Be thou *faithful unto death*, and I will give thee the crown of life:" "Then shall *the righteous*" (those who have made it their aspiration to reach the lofty divine ideal) "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

Again, let us pass down the gulph of time to the same solemn hour. We may imagine the avowal of another to be this—"Behold, I thought" that *God would be too merciful to punish*. "I thought" that He would never surely visit such stern retribution on the creature of His own hands; "I thought," when I came really to confront His bar, that He would either modify His recorded threatenings, or else, perchance, by a great affluent exercise of His love, grant a universal reprieve and amnesty. "I thought," when I gazed on His outer visible creation, I saw no hieroglyphic of wrath. I saw love pencilled on

every flower ; I heard it murmured in every breeze, sung in the chorus of birds, proclaimed by the gleaming sun by day, and serenaded by the silent stars at night. Moreover, in looking around me on the moral world, I imagined some dim fore-shadowings might be seen of the divine oblivion of sin and reluctance to punish. "Sentence against an evil work" was not, in the earthly economy, "executed speedily." I saw, oftentimes virtue languishing unrewarded, and vice raising unrebuked her brazen forehead. When the Almighty did these things, and "kept silence," "behold, I thought" that He was "altogether such an one as myself!" I dreamt not of the *necessity* of the exercise of His justice;—that though He pities the sinner, the holiness of His nature requires him to punish *sin*. The first glimpse of His righteous judgment-seat has dissipated the delusion ; I am brought to read in the name and memorial of a *merciful* God—"And that will by no means clear the guilty."

To refute similar "thoughts," to which, it is feared, multitudes are clinging, and who, in doing so, reduce the unchangeable Creator to a level with

the vacillating creature,—it is enough, surely, to point to the Incarnation and Passion of the Divine Redeemer, and the awful lessons which cluster around them. Can we—dare we, for a moment venture on the supposition, that God would have visited His innocent Son with such unparalleled anguish—that He would have inflicted on Him that shameful death, if He could otherwise have revoked the penalties annexed to transgression;—if that mercy which endureth for ever, could have silenced the voice of righteous retribution, and conferred on the erring an unconditional pardon? The entertainment of the idea, is equivalent to representing Gethsemane's garden and Calvary's cross as two superfluous scenes of woe, and the Eternal Father (we say it with reverence) as subjecting the Prince of Life and Lord of Glory to a redundant tragedy of blood and suffering! Let that “cross and passion” read another and far different lesson. If sin required so awful an expiation from the *Innocent*, what will it require from the *guilty*? If God poured out the vials of imputed wrath on the head of a spotless Immaculate Surety, what

will He do to the bold, defiant scorner of His grace,—the rejecter of “so great salvation.” “If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”

Once more. From another crowd in that Great day of retribution, there will be heard the utterance of a more fearful “thought” still;—“*Behold, I thought*” that the whole world of spiritual realities was a myth—that religion was a falsehood—that God and heaven were illusions of fond fancy—that hell was a tale and nightmare of priestly terror—Revelation a repertory of artful and antiquated forgeries which superstition had palmed from age to age on a credulous world. “I thought” that there was light enough in my own intellectual nature to guide me. I heard the priests of the Temple—the recognised interpreters of the oracles of God—proclaim truths which were unaccredited and unauthenticated by any other testimony. External nature seemed to belie them. They spake of “the end of all things;” the dissolution of the existing economy; the coming of the Son of God in the clouds of

heaven. I looked abroad on the material earth, with its canopy of firmament; it seemed to anticipate and echo my own sceptic thought—"Where is the promise of His coming?" All things continued as they were. There was no cloud in all the horizon,—no shadow to warn of coming vengeance. Seasons revolved, and suns rose and set, and men bought and sold; the world seemed as buoyant with youth as ever. I thought to myself, Why practise a life of self-denial, as I see others do, on a mere peradventure? The visible testimony of the globe I live on, is more reliable than the averments of some old parchment scrolls and devout dreamers. I shall take my chance of these alleged premonitions of coming wrath. Reason shall be the priestess of my altar, and Pleasure the enshrined goddess. Mine shall be the happy creed, of death an eternal sleep, and the grave a last, long home, whose slumbers no fictitious trumpet-peal of Judgment shall ever break!

How many, in this age of rampant infidelity and unbridled licence, are deluding themselves with these very "thoughts:"—the infidelity of the head, stimulated by the worse infidelity of the

heart, (for it is "*in his heart*" the fool hath said, "There is no God," Ps. xiv. 1). None, doubtless, who peruse these pages, are thus wrecked on such unhappy shoals of error; despite of an outward religious profession, clinging to the horrible creed and vague hope, that, after all, there may be no personal Deity, no retributive economy—that death may be annihilation, eternity a blank! But we may well give the needful word of warning—"Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." "Beware lest ye also, being led away by the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." There is no subject more important than the relation of Reason to Faith, and Faith to Reason. We do not dethrone the latter from her own place—her God-assigned place—in the moral economy; "We speak that we do know." Reason, if rightly employed, ought to have her own mission; not as the antagonist, but as the sister and handmaid of Faith. But the command of Christ is not, "REASON yourself unto me," but, "*Come* unto me;" "BELIEVE in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "If ye do not *believe*, surely ye

shall not be established." Do not begin, first, to cavil at the doctrine—to raise up mists of unbelief between you and the Sun of righteousness—to find out flaws and scars in the temple-pillars. Enter the sacred shrine. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." The Divine injunction, with reference to those sceptic imaginations, is a message of tender compassion and love—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his THOUGHTS, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and unto our God, and He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. lv. 7).

Finally, what is the great lesson to us all from this subject? Is it not *now* to take God at His word? Like Naaman, we "think," and pause, and hesitate, when the divine injunction and exhortation is, "*Only believe.*" When a child receives a command from his parent, he does not first weigh, and ponder, and question its propriety:—he does not say, "Behold, I thought" that so and so would have been better; but he DOES it; he obeys. With him the parent's word is law.

Reader, that is what God expects and demands of *you*. Not to subject to a hard and rigid analysis His dealings either in providence or grace, but simply to ask, "Lord, what wouldst Thou have me to do?"

Oh ! let there be no hard thoughts on your part with reference to Him. His thoughts, towards you, are thoughts of mercy. "How precious also are *Thy thoughts* unto me, O God; how great is the sum of them. If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand." Be it yours to breathe the prayer of simple faith, docile reverence, filial love—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know MY THOUGHTS, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

VII.

Seasonable Interposition.

"AND HIS SERVANTS CAME NEAR, AND SPAKE UNTO HIM, AND SAID, MY FATHER, IF THE PROPHET HAD BID THEE DO SOME GREAT THING, Wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, wash, and be clean?"—2 KINGS V. 13.

Seasonable Interposition.

To resume the narrative. We left the Syrian warrior when he had just received the humbling and unexpected message from Elisha, to wash seven times in Jordan. Chafed and irritated, he could not brook the imagined affront. In a moment the cavalcade turned. With knitted brow, and smarting with injured pride, he had his back on the Prophet's home, and his face towards Damascus! Nothing but the divine intervention could now save him. If we had not indeed already known the sequel, we should have considered his case as hopeless, and looked upon that cavalcade as a funeral procession, wending their way to a leper's grave.

Not a few, doubtless, can recall similar perilous seasons in their own history, when, in some sudden gust of passion or of temptation, they have turned a deaf ear to the voice of Providence. By

one rash "thought," one depraved act, one ungodly counsel, they have been ready to sacrifice and surrender a lifetime of promise, making shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience—that, too, with the waters of salvation (like the Jordan at Gilgal) in sight, and spiritual guides, like Elisha, faithfully directing their way. But God has mercifully borne with their folly; manifesting patience and forbearance, where there might righteously have been rejection and abandonment. He has not cast off *them*, though they were on the point of casting off *Him*. He has sent His servants, like those of the Aramite chief, to reason and expostulate,—to warn of guilt and danger, to put a restraint on demon-passion, and turn the helm, when the rocks would have been otherwise grazed and the ship hurried in the blinding tempest to irrevocable doom. Yes, how many have to tell, But for these messengers appointed to plead with us—a faithful Friend, Sickness, Affliction, Bereavement—we might this day have been journeying backwards, each to his own Damascus, with the fouler gangrene—the deeper taint of moral leprosy, claiming us as its hapless victims!

But let us proceed to gather, from the verse heading this chapter, a few plain, practical lessons chiefly bearing on everyday conduct and life.

Let us mark *the effect of timely remonstrance*. The caravan has commenced its retrograde movement; the procession is actually wending its way from the Prophet's watchtower up the pass of Ai, soon to be lost from view among the glens of Ephraim;—when Naaman's Syrian attendants duteously approach the side of the chariot, saying, "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"

The first impulse of these servants might have been very different. Nor could we have wondered, or condemned them, if they had keenly felt and promptly resented a supposed insult,—venting their indignation against the discourteous prophet who had so duped both their leader and themselves. Sulkily falling back in the rear of the procession, and leaping on their saddles, they might have held on their way in sullen silence. Or, taking a more

favourable view of their feelings ; supposing they had not thought so hardly of the seer's message as their master had done, we might, at all events, have imagined them saying to one another, " Would that he had assented to the directions of this Hebrew ! But *we* dare not interfere. It would ill become us to interpose our opinion. It would be the height of presumption to venture a remonstrance. It is to be regretted that a gust of ill-timed passion should ruin the whole object of the journey. We are, however, only menials and dependants ; our duty, in any circumstances, is to remain passive. It would be at the peril of place and pay to lull such a hurricane. It might be instant death to intermeddle with the chafed and galled lion. Let matters take their course : he will be the sufferer ; it is nothing to us."

Not so. Theirs might be the more daring and riskful, but it was " the more excellent way." They exemplified, by their conduct, the truth of the saying, " A word spoken in due season, how good is it !" Ah ! how much evil in the world (aye, too, and in the little world of our individual influence) might often be averted by well-timed remonstrance !

How often, by a guilty silence, do we suffer great opportunities for good to pass away ! How many vessels, driven on the sands of unbelief or profligacy, might, humanly speaking, have been saved, had the beacon been pointed out in time, and the voice of counsel and warning been judiciously lifted up ! Had that parent been more faithful in checking the incipient tendency to dissipation ; had that employer locked the door of his counting-room, and to that friendless young man environed with the temptations of city life, spoken solemnly and seriously, now that he was removed from the hallowed restraints of the old roof-tree. Yes ; and those poor, hapless wrecks of society, who dishonour their name and sex,—wretched outcasts from virtue and peace,—how often might they too have been snatched as brands from the burning, if some earnest, tender, faithful word had been whispered in their ears ;—if a cruel world, in the first moment of suspicion, instead of turning its back coldly upon them, hurling envenomed darts of slander and reproach and scorn, had acted the nobler and more Christianlike part, of pleading with the yet unseared and sensitive conscience, urging

instantaneous return to the good old paths—saying, as the great Lord of conscience did to one such pining, withered flower, whom others had mercilessly trodden and trampled under foot, “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.”

A second lesson we may learn is, to *beware of the latent pride of the human heart*. The servants of Naaman, in their expostulation with him, seize at once on the reason of his disappointed and outraged feeling. “My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it.” Their master would have preferred, and doubtless expected, some injunction that would have been flattering to his pride and vain glory. It was, as has been already noted, the insignificance of the Jordan ablution that was offensive and distasteful to him. If the Prophet (as we have had also occasion to illustrate in a previous chapter, but which again meets us more appropriately here)—if the Prophet had required of him the performance of some great feat, or subjected him to some great privation, or demanded

some costly sacrifice, he would probably have unhesitatingly assented. Had it been the toil and effort of a lengthened pilgrimage, or the pain of bodily penance ;—had it been the exaction of lordly tribute from his Syrian possessions,—hecatombs of cattle, the pride of Lebanon's cedars, or the wealth of olive-groves by the Abana,—he would, without much reluctance, have taxed his princely revenues to liquidate the debt. But to undertake all that tedious journey, and simply to be told at the end of it, and as the result of it, to "wash in Jordan"—there was no heroism, no chivalry, about that. It was what the humblest Jew who lived near its banks was in the habit of doing daily. To obey such an injunction, would be to put himself on a level with the peasants and vinedressers and slaves in the Hebrew villages around. The old blood of the warrior was roused, the resolve was taken, and the homeward journey commenced.

The conduct of Naaman has here, too, its faithful analogy and counterpart in the opposition of many to the gospel plan of salvation. They have no idea of being saved in the same manner and on the same conditions as the vilest and most

abandoned. Give them some special and exceptional recipe and prescription for their acknowledged spiritual maladies ; let them get into heaven by the entrance which admits the honest, and virtuous, and reputable, and charitable. But to put them on the same footing—to make them walk in the same pathway and to bathe in the same stream as yonder profligate and drunkard and liar—men once of demoralised habits, degraded principles, and vicious life—the pride of nature revolts at the thought. They must have a respectable method of restoration, or they will reject and repudiate the revealed one. It was for this reason the gospel proved to the Jew a stumblingblock, and to the Greek foolishness. The son of Abraham, with his long pedigree, his pride of national descent, his covenant privileges, and punctilious performance of ritualistic ceremony ; the Greek, with his boasted worldly wisdom and his systems of refined philosophy, could not brook the idea of being placed on a level with the ignorant and vile ; with slaves and publicans, sinners and harlots ; and of being brought to own, as their Saviour, the crucified Son of a Hebrew mechanic,

a lowly carpenter of Galilee. This, however, is that gospel's first and indisputable lesson—to count all native excellencies and graces and endowments and virtues, as loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. At His cross the rich and poor must meet together, for He, the Lord, is the Redeemer of them all. Great and mean, noble and despised, the man of fair character and irreproachable life, as well as the lowest profligate bathed in tears of penitence and shame,—all must endorse the one utterance and employ the one prayer—"God be merciful to me a sinner!" The hungry He filleth with good things, while the rich (in their own estimation) He sends empty away.

We may also learn here that *God is glorified by obedience to His will in LITTLE things.* Naaman was willing enough to do "a *great* thing." He was unwilling to stoop to do a *little* one. How many there are—and that, too, in "the religious world"—who are ready and eager to enlist in some bold and startling enterprise—ready for a life of high consecration in a large and influential sphere,

but who dwarf and dwindle into inaction and listlessness in a small and limited one. In some prominent position on the Church battlements, they are all ardour and devotion, all activity and zeal; but they have no taste nor patience for subordinate place or lowly duty; prepared to undertake the toilsome pilgrimage, or to embark in the herculean task, but ready with a negative whenever anything so insignificant is mentioned as the Jordan ablution.

We believe we have abundant warrant for the assertion, that those *most* glorify God, who, without the often false stimulus of outward and secondary motives, perform gladly that class of humble, unostentatious deeds and services, which, requiring no intellectual effort, no brilliant gifts, are unacknowledged by the world's approval,—unplaudited by the world's hosannahs. Such, assuredly, will not be unowned or rejected by the Great Recompenser, because they have nothing better or costlier to offer. While it is said of "the mountains" (the Church's great ones) that they shall "bring peace to the people," "the little hills" (the Church's humble, unknown, obscure ones)

are to do so also "by righteousness" (Ps. lxxii. 3). Let none be coveting opportunity for the execution of onerous labours, or for occupying conspicuous positions, as if these enjoyed a monopoly in the divine favour and approval. The hewer of wood and drawer of water in the Tabernacle and Temple of old—if (what might be deemed) his *drudgery* were performed from a principle of obedience and lowly fidelity—served the God of the temple, as much as the High Priest with his breastplate gleaming with the Urim and Thummim. Motive is everything with the omniscient Heart-searcher; and He is satisfied, if we fulfil with a good conscience our apportioned place and destiny, whatever that may be. The little firefly illuminating the darkness in the balmy plains of the south, is one of the tiniest lamps in God's magnificent Temple of night,—a mere glimmering spark compared with other and nobler Altar-fires of moon and stars in the same great sanctuary. But that insect does not refuse to rise on its wings of flame, because unable to emit a greater amount of light; it is content to shine with the lustre assigned to it in its humble place in the material economy, and the Creator is

glorified thereby. The insignificant, "nameless rill" does not refuse to sing its way to the ocean, because, on the opposite side of the mountain or valley, a mightier torrent is thundering along, and bearing in its course a huger and wealthier volume. It carries its appointed tribute to the sea ; and He who " sendeth forth the springs into the valleys which run among the hills," expects from it no more. " She hath done what she could," is the divine meed of approbation. The one lowly talent conscientiously traded on, will receive its own with usury. The widow's mite and the cup of cold water are owned and accepted, and the intention and desire would be accepted, if there were no mite and no cup to give.

" I would not have the restless will
That hurries to and fro,
Seeking for some great thing to do,
Or secret thing to know ;
I would be treated as a child,
And guided where I go.

" So I ask Thee for the daily strength
To none that ask denied,
And a mind to blend with outward life
While keeping at Thy side ;
Content to fill a *little* space
If Thou be glorified.

“ And if some things I do not ask
In my cup of blessing be,
I would have my spirit filled the more
With grateful love to Thee ;
More careful than to serve Thee much,
To please Thee perfectly.”

Let us learn, from the servants of Naaman, a similar lesson to that which we drew, in a former chapter, from the example of the little captive maid—the *divine art of speaking kindly*. If these servants had, with coarse and blustering importunity, assailed their master, the likelihood is they would only have added fuel to the flames and augmented his anger. But, though naturally irritable, and from his rank and antecedents impatient of contradiction, they knew he was not ungenerous nor inaccessible to courteous and well-meant expostulation. Coming up, therefore, to the side of his chariot, they addressed him by the affectionate term, “ My father.”

Let it be our uniform endeavour to cultivate, in daily intercourse and conversation, this urbanity of manner and speech—this gentle, kind consideration for the feelings, it may even be the foibles and infirmities, of others. Some there are, wittingly,

others unwittingly, who cannot convey a remark or an advice but in rough and rugged tones,—harshly grating on feelings that may be more delicately strung than their own, leaving behind unpleasing memories, sometimes inflicting wounds that a lifetime cannot heal. On the other hand, what a winning power there is in kindness ! How softly and musically the wheels of daily life revolve, when they are touched and softened with this “excellent oil !” What conquests it can win over the morose and sullen, the selfish and irritable ! The moral of the old fable is true to the letter, which describes the conflict between the wind and the sun, as to which would induce the traveller most readily to part with his cloak. The tempest takes the initiative. But the whirlwind of passion,—stormy rage, and angry tones,—only lead to the wrapping of it more closely around. The other competitor plies, in turn, his milder influences. The sun shines,—the gentle, glowing beams of kindness begin to play ; fold by fold is unloosed ; the triumph is complete. In the iron viaduct, greater is said to be the deflexion caused by the solar rays, than when the heaviest train is passing

over it. So the genial influence and sunshine of kind words, can bend and subdue when nothing else can. As in the tragic war of the elements among the cliffs of Horeb ; what the earthquake, the hurricane, and the fire fail to effect, is often compassed and insured by " the still, small voice." A gentle child, to recur to a former illustration, smoothing the furrowed and anxious brow, can ward off tears and summon smiles, and bend and alter stern purposes, which the world's cold reasoning, dogged mandates, and imperious tones could never accomplish. " Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted." " Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love." Speak gently ; act gently. It is an inexpensive way of dispensing blessings—a cheap road to favour and regard ;—whether it be master to servant, or parent to child, or neighbour to neighbour, or friend to friend. We need the interchange of loving sayings and doings amid the rough contacts and blasts of life. When waggons on the world's highway come into collision,—when the wheels are locked and the bales tumble into the mud,—the gospel method is not for the waggoners to pull up the team and to vent on one another a

hailstorm of wrath, when both are likely to have a share of the blame,—but to see, rather, who will be the first to leap down, extricate the goods from the ruts, and do their best to make the thoroughfare smooth again. Alas! that want of courteous, considerate, gentle dealing, by word and deed, is often “the fly in the apothecary’s ointment,” which spoils and injures character otherwise estimable, and takes happiness and brightness from otherwise favoured homes. Let us again remember here, the conduct and example of the Great Master. Prophecy had, ages before the Incarnation, prepared the world for the advent of One into whose lips “grace (*kindness*) was poured;” who would not “strive nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets;” who “would not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.” How exactly did the character and actions of the Christ of Nazareth accord with the prefiguration! “And all bare Him witness, and wondered at *the gracious words* which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke iv. 22). See Him in His hour of deepest abasement, when He needed most the presence and wakeful sympathy of His trusted followers,

how graciously and tenderly, even when administering a rebuke, He tempers it with a merciful apology for their slumbering and unwatchfulness,—"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And when the most faithless and renegade of their number has, with cruel aggravation, disowned and denied Him—see, when confronted on the shores of Tiberias, how his injured Lord, oblivious of all the past, has no harsher reproof to utter than that contained in the thrice-repeated refrain—"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

Once more; the same lesson again claims our attention, in the case of these Syrian servants, which we have, also in an earlier chapter, deduced from the story of the captive maid—*the possibility on the part of all* (however lowly their rank, and however secular their calling) *of exercising a salutary influence*. It is one of the many heresies of modern days—not in the region of dogma, but of practice—that effort and work, whether religious or philanthropic, belong mainly, if not exclusively, to those who are invested with priestly and ministerial gifts and qualifications, and that, outside

these accredited orders, responsibility ceases. How different are the teachings of Scripture, both in the Old Testament and in the New! Naaman, this imperious Syrian captain, is soothed, calmed, made to relent — by whom? Not by God's Prophet; Elisha does not interfere; he keeps within the walls of his Gilgal dwelling, and attempts personally no remonstrance with the irate warrior. It is the word of the servants, which arrests the chariot, and alters the pettish and otherwise fatal resolve. If these dependants had reasoned, as many now-a-days do, they would have said, "If the man of God chooses to remonstrate, let him do so. That leprosy being connected with sin, the dealing with it is a religious matter. We do all that is required of us, if we faithfully perform our secular work, whether it be that of bodyguard, or camel-driver, or charioteer. It is not for us to usurp the office of teacher or censor. Business has its allotted and recognised sphere and season, and so has religion. We keep to our province, let the priest keep to his." Or, translating it into modern phraseology—We have to do only with buying and selling, with lading and

trading, with bills and exchange, with mart and counter. Are there servants in our household doing our drudgery—strangers, it may be, from distant homes, who might be the better now and then of a kindly word, a pious advice, or salutary warning? No; this is the vocation of their religious instructors, not ours; the less we intermeddle with their ways and affairs the better. Or, There is one we know who is undergoing severe family affliction; we cannot fail to be cognisant of the cheerlessness of his position, and the solitariness of his heart. A word, or letter, or message of sympathy, would tend to soothe his anguished spirit. That unused book in our library, that “Afflicted Man’s Companion,” might prove a comfort and solace as he sits down at night by his lonely fire, and misses the face of wife or children. But this is not our concern. To be “sons of consolation” is no work of ours. Or, Yonder is our early friend; his presence was wont often to gladden our home, and we valued his cheerful society. He has, as the world calls it, “forgot himself.” He is trembling on the brink of the precipice. We might, by timely stretching

out our hand, or by a judicious word now spoken, yet save him from perhaps sadder deterioration. But what business, after all, is it of ours to interfere, or what thanks shall we get for our pains? Let the chariot move on, and the leprosy-spot increase; if his minister's visit and the Sunday sermon cannot reclaim him, what chance have we?

The servants of Naaman furnish us with a more hopeful—a more brotherly view than this. Nay, we would venture to aver, that agency and intervention akin to theirs, often reaches and succeeds, when, what might be deemed and called “influential instrumentality” fails and falters. Perhaps, even if Elisha had come out on the present occasion, and pled with that galled and fretted Syrian, he could not have prevailed half so powerfully, as his own confidential servants. His interposition might have been spurned and rejected, while theirs was accepted and triumphed. Specially under the higher and nobler spiritual dispensation under which we live, let us never forget, as members of the Christian priesthood, our individual responsibility in the sphere which

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we are called to occupy. To each one, whatever be his position or circumstances, the command of the Great Husbandman is imperative, "Son, go *work* in my vineyard" (Matt. xxi. 28). Nor is it unworthy of note, for the encouragement of those whose sphere is limited, that all throughout this inspired narrative (the whole story of the Syrian leper) we have nothing but a series of *humble* agencies. The chariot of the warrior was set in motion by a little Hebrew slave. The next personage mentioned was a potent and influential one—Joram, king of Israel:—he could do nothing. The next was the servant of this unostentatious prophet, sent to invite Naaman to Gilgal. Then, we have his own personal attendants here remonstrating. And finally, we have the washing in Jordan,—an unworthy stream, compared with the Abana and Pharpar of his own Damascus.

Who dare decry or depreciate the smallest and unlikeliest instrumentality? "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation" (Isa. lx. 22). Lowly may be the means God employs in speaking to *us*, as He did to Naaman. As our chariots move on in life's high-

way, let us listen meekly to the humblest providential voices; and regard them as divine delegates, beckoning us to turn our back no longer on the waters of salvation, but to close with the free invitation; or, if we have already thus closed, to cling with greater trustfulness and faith to the sublime simplicity of the gospel plan and message —“ Wash, and be clean !”

VIII.

The Crisis and the Cure.

"THEN WENT HE DOWN, AND DIPPED HIMSELF SEVEN TIMES IN JORDAN, ACCORDING TO THE SAYING OF THE MAN OF GOD : AND HIS FLESH CAME AGAIN LIKE UNTO THE FLESH OF A LITTLE CHILD, AND HE WAS CLEAN. AND HE RETURNED TO THE MAN OF GOD, HE AND ALL HIS COMPANY, AND CAME AND STOOD BEFORE HIM."—2 KINGS v. 14, 15.

The Crisis and the Cure.

NAAMAN's stormy passion is calmed. In accordance with the direction of Elisha, and yielding to the advice of his faithful attendants, he submits to the appointed means of restoration. We may picture in thought, the cavalcade moving from the Prophet's door along the low level plain towards the banks of the river. Shall we farther venture the supposition, that the time was at the approach of evening, when the sun was westering, and the Moab mountains were already assuming those purple and roseate hues so familiar to travellers in the Ghôr at this day—one of the few features indeed in outer nature, unchanged since the times of the Syrian.

There are, generally, one or more, signal and momentous epochs which occur in every life, and especially in the lives of those who have left their mark and impress on the world. The night when

Abraham was led out by his Almighty Protector to gaze upon the glories of an eastern sky, as the emblem and prophecy of his vast progeny. The night when Jacob wrestled with the angel-God at Peniel, and came forth halting, yet victorious ; inspired with new and nobler impulses for the future. The noontide hour, when the woman of Samaria owned the Pilgrim at the well of Sychar as the expected Messiah, abandoned for ever her flagitious life, and drank of the living water. The season and spot when "the anxious inquirer" in the desert of Gaza had the darkened page he was reading illumined with glorious light, and when, the quest of a long pilgrimage gained, "he went on his way rejoicing." Among historical instances in the Christian Church, we may instance the hour when Augustine obeyed the irresistible impulse awakened by the divine voice—"Take it up and read, take it up and read ;" or when Luther, overtaken in the storm of thunder, and a lightning-bolt bursting at his feet, felt encompassed by the terrors of death ; and throwing himself on his knees on the highway to Erfurth, became from that hour an altered man. Similar,

also, are individual experiences of everyday occurrence ; when the favourable turn takes place in alarming sickness ; when the life of some dear child, "balanced in a breath," is unexpectedly restored ; when the preaching of the gospel comes home "in demonstration of the Spirit and with power," and the guilt and folly of a false, wasted, neglected past is vividly realised, tearfully bewailed, and earnestly renounced. These, and similar critical seasons, become the birthday of nobler purposes and resolutions : "Thy vows are upon me, O God : I will render praises unto Thee. For Thou hast delivered my soul from death : wilt not Thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" (Ps. lvi. 12, 13).

Such was the crisis we have reached in the story of Naaman, when we read of him (ver. 14), "Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God : and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." We may picture the conflict of emotions, while, stepping down from his chariot, he disrobed him-

self of his gorgeous attire, and was about to plunge into the border-stream,—the expectant crowd of retainers gathered around, all anxiety as to the result. It is done! The Lord of the Hebrews has been true to His word—"He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper" (Ps. lxxii. 12). The words of Joshua, uttered in a former age, nigh the same spot, have a new application and significance with reference to the Gentile chief—"Behold the Ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth passeth over before you into Jordan!" Naaman was henceforth included among "the sons of the stranger that join themselves to the Lord" (Isa. lvi. 6), on whom the divine promise is bestowed—"I will give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off" (Isa. lvi. 5). As he emerges from the waters, he feels the glow of new health tingling in his veins. No insensate bud, if gifted for the moment with sensation, could so feel the transition, when the closed petals burst at the summons of spring and sunshine, and

effloresce in loveliness and beauty. No creeping caterpillar could so feel the transition, when, from the dull and torpid chrysalis, it becomes cognisant of "the tremble and flutter of its golden wings" and soars aloft in resurrection attire. If that man clasps his deliverer in tearful gratitude, who has snatched him from a watery grave, and brought him dripping to the shore; what must have been Naaman's emotions of "wonder, love, and praise" to that God who had delivered him from so great a death, and replenished him with joyous life? Nobler and better too than outward healing, he felt, from that hour onwards, that he was renovated in soul as well as in body. Rimmon and his brotherhood of lying deities were henceforth abjured—a bill of divorcement was written against them all—"In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver and his idols of gold to the moles and to the bats." In the words of Krummacher, "the obstinate heathen with his 'I thought,' is left behind in the watery grave of the Jordan. The rude warrior, who was almost beside himself with rage and vexation, died; and a person, gentle and peaceful as a dove, has risen from his ashes.

‘Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.’ Thus speaks the man who, a few hours before, went about in the fetters of the most deplorable darkness. The infernal charm is dissolved ; the snare is broken ; the bird has escaped. A new creature, born of God, stands in unveiled beauty before our eyes.” That triumphal band, inconspicuous in numbers, which wound its way from the fords of the Jordan up to the heights of Gilgal, possessed elements of lofty and sacred interest which belonged to no Roman procession ascending the steps of the Imperial Capitol in its palmy days. Naaman himself was familiar with the jubilant throngs that were wont to welcome his own victorious legions through the gates of Damascus ; but grander and diviner hosannahs than those of earth were greeting that chariot of peace, and its crowned and “beautified” conqueror. Undiscernible to human vision, as were the chariots and horses of fire disclosed by the Prophet of Gilgal on the mountain at Dothan, the angels of God were now encamping round this new trophy of divine power and mercy. Clad in nobler panoply and richer

attire than could be furnished by spoils of earthly conquest, he could take up, in spirit, words which were ere long to be sung by the great prophet-minstrel—"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isa. lxi. 10).

But without farther anticipating, let us endeavour to gather one or two of the more palpable practical reflections which this new turning-point in the story suggests.

Observe *the power of God's upholding and sustaining grace*. We have already commented on the *sovereignty* of that grace in choosing a wild olive-tree from the soil of heathendom. We have now to note how that same grace, in another form, shielded the rash, impetuous warrior, when he had seemingly entangled himself in the toils of the great adversary, and his romantic pilgrimage was about to be ingloriously cut short by an outburst of wounded pride. "Surely in vain," says the Wise Man, "the net is spread in the sight of any

bird" (Prov. i. 17). The Jehovah of Israel had not only, as we have seen, marked that Gentile Syrian from all eternity as His own, but, as in the case of each of His true people, having begun a good work, He will carry it on. For a moment, indeed—to follow the metaphor of the Hebrew philosopher—the net seems to have been too successfully and fatally spread; the ensnared victim—that haughty eagle from the cliffs of Lebanon—lies, apparently, with broken pinion and ruffled plumage, fluttering in the dust: or rather, when the cage was opened for freedom and flight, he dashes the wings of passion against the enclosing bars, rejecting in his folly the proffered boon. We can well imagine, that if there was one in the Valley of Jericho, less likely than another to listen to the calm words of reason, it was this blinded, imperious, unreflecting child of nature. If Naaman had been left to himself, he never would have reached Damascus other than the leper he had left it; with the foul spot on his brow, and disappointed rage, like a demon from the abyss, torturing his spirit;—the last state of that man would have been worse than the first! But "is there any-

thing too hard for the Lord?" "The wisdom of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." As we see the chariot retracing its way to the Hebrew Prophet's dwelling, and the hero of the armies of Damascus already reaping that hardest of victories, over his own selfishness and pride; are we not constrained to feel that it is no mere power of human persuasion and remonstrance that has effected the change of purpose, stilling the waves of that stormy soul, and saying, "Peace, be still!" We behold in it the interposition of Him who "maketh the wrath of man to praise Him, and restraineth the remainder of His wrath." When nature was ready to fail—the vessel about to founder on the rocks—grace came to his aid, and effected the needed rescue. "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength."

Some, possibly, as they ponder the narrative, may mark in its features notable resemblances to their own past experience; how at some memorable period of their history, when, forgetful of the way of duty and obedience, the too pliable chariot-wheels, obeying the impulse of passion and pre-

judice, selfishness and unbelief, were speeding onwards to destruction,—a hand, stronger than human, reined in the rampant steeds; some mysterious influence (call it what they may), confronted them, like the messenger who of old with glittering sword stood in the pathway of the Moabite seer, and a voice louder and diviner than that of either ministering or avenging angel was heard saying, “Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?” Truly “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance;” that is, they are independent of all human caprice, wilful waywardness, fitful passion. But for this sustaining and restraining grace, how many would have been swept down, like brittle reeds, before the hurricane. How many have reason to make the confession on life’s retrospect, “Unless the Lord hath been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence; when I said, My foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up” (Ps. xciv. 17, 18). How many have to point to words which, in an age long subsequent to that of Naaman, were uttered by divine lips to one who partook not a little of the mingled elements in Naaman’s complex character—“Simon, Simon, Satan hath

desired to have thee, that he might sift thee as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not" (Luke xxii. 32).

Let us mark *the difference between relenting and unrelenting passion*. Naaman "went away in a rage." This was reprehensible enough. Anger has been well called "a short madness." Few things are more humiliating than to see a man the deplorable and misguided victim and slave of his own irascible, ungovernable feelings; his bosom the crater of a burning volcano pouring down its hot lava-stream, a torrent of liquid fire; and that, also, too patent and visible to all around. But worse, is the case of sullen, implacable anger. Bad enough is the fierce eruptive outburst of passion which expends itself in its own vehemence;—that which the great poet of human nature so well describes in words he puts into the lips of the old Roman—

" You are yokèd with a lamb
That carries anger as the flint bears fire,
Which, much enforcèd, shows a hasty spark,
And straight is cold again."

But, sadder far, is the calm, vindictive, settled feel-

ing,—the confirmed, chronic malevolence,—the devil-spirit, which seems to defy being exorcised ; which no persuasion can melt, and no approach of kindliness can mollify or subdue. You might as well attempt to move the world, as turn the wheels of that man's chariot. All the while he thinks himself a martyr. There is to his own apprehension an imagined heroism and chivalry about his stubborn, unrelenting mood. With morbid, sullen self-complacency he entrenches himself within these moats of wounded pride, pitied by none but himself.

It might have been so with Naaman. He might have muffled himself in his warrior-cloak, and the frown which gathered on his brow at the Prophet's door might have deepened as he proceeded on his way. In dogged silence he might have listened to his servant's remonstrances, or bid them, in a tempest of rage, back to their camels. He might have entered Damascus cursing the God of Israel, and vowing summary vengeance against the hated Hebrews and their lying prophets. But the voice of kindly remonstrance had prevailed. "A man's pride," says the Preacher, "shall bring him low ;

but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit" (Prov. xxix. 23). This "great man with his master, and *honourable*" is willing to be reasoned with, even by inferiors, and by them to have the folly and infatuation of his rage pointed out. The chariot is turned, and the next moment he is on his way down to the Jordan Valley. "He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

Who does not recall a nobler example for imitation? Think of the "Greater than Solomon,"—across whose pure human soul no gust of passion ever passed its sirocco-breath—"Who when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. ii. 23).

Let us observe, farther, *the recompense of child-like obedience and unquestioning faith*. "Then went he down, according to the saying of the man of God." It may have been a great struggle for the baulked and humbled hero thus to return. It may—it must, have cost him no small effort to

adopt these second thoughts. But it is "the saying of the man of God" and that is enough. Perhaps, too, when he reached the banks of the muddy river, and discerned, more vividly than he could do at a distance, the contrast with the crystal streams of Damascus, inclination would renew its promptings to cancel his purpose and resume his homeward journey. But, again, he remembers "it is the saying of the man of God." The child-spirit has risen to the ascendant; the better nature and better resolve are dominant; on he proceeds, staggering not through unbelief.

Be it ours to cherish a similar devout, unquestioning reverence for the sayings of God's inspired servants in His Holy Book; recognising in their contents, not what man's wisdom teacheth, but what the Holy Ghost teacheth. Not receiving just so much as suits our prepossessions and inclinations, or that squares with our carnal reasonings, rejecting the rest. Not exclaiming, as Naaman in his folly did, "Behold, I thought!" (the essence alike of modern rationalistic philosophy and theology) but as he came to say, in his better mind, "Behold, I believe." Reason, untempered and unchastened

by the spirit of faith, turns many a chariot in these days, from the door of the prophet and the prophet's God,—indulging in the defiant spirit of the scoffers in the time of Ezekiel—"Ah, Lord God! doth he not speak parables." Others, venturing on more daring assertion, can see in the sublime simplicities of Scripture teaching, only the worn out and effete truisms and crudities of bygone centuries, out of harmony with an age of boasted advancement—an age which demands that revealed doctrines be accepted or rejected by what is called "the verifying faculty," or according as they tally with "the response of the inner consciousness." God's inspired utterances dare not thus be degraded, by being subjected to the caprice of human manipulation. The true principle of the Baconian philosophy, applied to spiritual as to material things, ought to be this—not, "How thinkest thou?" but, "How readest thou?" not carving out our own hypotheses and conceptions on the sacred tablet of truth, but seeking, modestly and humbly, to decipher the divine hieroglyphics already there, and to the interpretation of which, faith and prayer together, afford the golden key.

Our use and treatment of the secular, in life's everyday experience, may well teach us a lesson in the higher regions of divine speculation. We do not analyse the bread we eat, or the water we drink, or the rays of the sun in which we bask, before venturing to enjoy the nutriment and refreshment of the one, or the brightness and warmth of the other. So it should be in our dealings with God's Holy Word. If we approach it with a carping, dogmatic, sceptical spirit, we shall never turn the wheels of the chariot in the direction of the waters of salvation. Once deflected from the old path of childlike docility and reverential submission and teachableness, there will be little chance of return. Things there are, doubtless, in Revelation, which, to our limited reason, are "hard to be understood." It was not to be expected that "the deep things of God" could be all made patent and perspicuous, in a present economy, to our limited apprehension. Whatsoever is really needful for our personal salvation, is revealed in the pages of the lively oracles as with the light of a sunbeam. And if there be other vexed questions or unsolved problems there, trust the divine Author of the Book that He will


one day be His own interpreter ; and vindicate, regarding His inspired *words*, the truth of the Psalmist's saying regarding His *works*, that they are "right" and "done in truth." Meanwhile, let it be ours to recognise in these utterances, not merely the sayings of the men of God, but the averments of "holy men," who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (1 Pet. i. 21). The quickening power of the Word, be it remembered, is the special result of the operation of that divine Agent on the receptive heart. "The Lord opened" the heart of Lydia, "that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts xvi. 14). We may well say, with the Ethiopian eunuch, as, seated in his chariot he read the Scriptures, "How can I understand, unless some one should guide me?" But was it not the Saviour's own promise, with reference to the great gift of the Paraclete contingent on His ascension—"He will guide you into all truth" (John xvi. 13) ; "He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you" (xvi. 14) ; "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance" (xiv. 26) ; "He will show you things to come" (xvi. 13).

Oh for docility of faith to follow the instructions and leadings of that Holy Spirit, though these, at times, may refuse to dovetail with preconceived theory and cherished speculation,—wounding the pride of nature, and turning the impatient coursers and their chariot from the beaten highways down to places of humiliation! The vision of divine influence and power, seen by one of the minor prophets, was not among the cedar-clad heights, but “among the myrtles *growing in the valley*” (Zech. i. 8).

Let us gather, as a fourth lesson, *the divine faithfulness, as manifested in the completion of Naaman's cure*—“And his flesh came again, like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” It was all as the Prophet, under divine direction, had declared.

We have already pictured in thought the scene. The leper descending into the waters of the Jordan—his servants remaining in suspense on the river-bank, watching with bated breath during these critical moments. Again and again, in obedience to the command of the Hebrew seer,

does he plunge overhead in the stream. Six times has the immersion been repeated. But the faith and obedience which triumphed over pride and self-will have as yet no indication of recompense. The leprosy still asserts its cruel sway over the ulcered body. Unbelief may have been tempted to make a final assault on the warrior, and, if possible, to entail defeat in the very moment of victory: just perhaps, as of old, within sight of the same spot, when, after six successive "encompassings," not a few hearts among the host of Joshua would be tempted to discredit the success of the divine injunction for the levelling of Jericho's ramparts. But, as on the seventh appointed round of that strange procession of the Covenant symbol, accompanied with trumpet-blast and shouting, the capital of the Jordan Valley became a ring and a heap of ruin: so was it now with Naaman. Plunging boldly, for the seventh time, into the turbid, rushing waters, he proves that the word of God is unchangeable. He comes forth a healed man. The Ethiopian *has* changed his skin and the leopard his spots; nay, not only so, he stands before his servants, as we have already noted, a trophy and miracle of



grace. A deeper taint than that of earthly leprosy has been purged away from his soul. The allegorical "great sheet" of a later age, in which the entranced apostle of Joppa saw clean and unclean animals indiscriminately mingled, is anticipated in the case of this Gentile of the Gentiles. In a truer and higher sense than appertaining to his mere physical frame, "he is not to be called common or unclean," "an alien from the commonwealth of Israel." "Old things have passed away, behold all things are become new."

Have we not the same ground to confide in the faithfulness of God to His declarations? "Thy testimonies that Thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful" (Ps. cxix. 138). In outer nature, we have a standing and continual pledge and guarantee for the divine veracity:—the regular alternation of day and night; sunset followed by morning dawn; spring treading on the heels of winter, and summer waiting with elastic step and beaming countenance to pour her treasures into the lap of autumn. The stars in their courses move as obediently to the divine command at this hour, as they did 3000 years ago: "They continue

this day according to Thine ordinances : for all are Thy servants " (Ps. cxix. 91). If God's volume of external nature be so undeviating, truthful, unerring, surely much more may we trust the volume of Revelation. All the promises therein are yea and amen. Jehovah himself, in a remarkable passage in the book of Jeremiah, takes the one covenant charter, written in visible characters on the material scroll, as a security for the fulfilment of the provisions in the charter of grace.—" Thus saith the Lord, If ye can break my covenant of the day and my covenant of the night, and that there shall not be day and night in their season, then " (but not till then) " may also my covenant be broken with David my servant " (Jer. xxxiii. 20, 21). " He is faithful that promised " (Heb. x. 23). On that same memorable occasion when, in the synagogue of Nazareth, our blessed Redeemer made reference to the case of " Naaman the Syrian,"—it is added, " All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth " (Luke iv. 22). How many in bygone centuries—how many among ourselves, would be ready and able to bear similar attesta-

tion to the fidelity as well as graciousness of these divine utterances? Naaman himself, could he be summoned from his silent sepulchre among Aramite warriors, "all of them lying in glory," would be the first to proffer his assenting testimony,—acknowledging (what he may have been unable to see at the time)—the necessity and fitness of the various preliminary steps in the procedure of the God of Israel. Would he not say to each trembling, misgiving heart, "Trust that God of Jeshurun: He will be better than His word. I came seeking only cleansing for the body, He hath delivered my soul from death:" He has "forgiven all mine iniquities" as well as "healed all my diseases, and redeemed my life from destruction:" He has "satisfied my mouth with good things, so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Ps. ciii. 3-6); "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him" (Ps. xxxiv. 8).

Reader! have you thus "known and believed" the love and the word of God? Have you tested His faithfulness, specially in the promise of all promises, the gift of all gifts? Have you gone, like

Naaman, to wash in the river of redeeming grace, the fountain of a Saviour's atoning blood? or are you forfeiting the boon, by indulging unnecessary misgivings as to your warrant to appropriate it? Be not faithless, but believing. Conjure up no erroneous impressions as to the inapplicability of the sure word of promise to *you*. It embraces all. All are warranted, all are welcome; "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37). On the other hand, reject this way of salvation, and there remains "no more," no other, "sacrifice for sin." Oh, if this Gentile idolater listened to the voice of a humble Hebrew prophet, turned his chariot, and submitted to what must have been, to his proud spirit, a humiliating cure; "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" But why should any continue thus either to neglect or to reject? Why not credit God, that "He says what He means, and means what He says:"—and laying your finger on the immutable, uncanceled, promise of the divine Promiser, thus urge the suit of an old pleader at the Mercy-seat—"Do as thou hast said" (2 Sam. vii. 25). Why not respond to the simple exhortation (quoted

in the title-page) of one, who, in his God-given gifts of bodily healing, has earned the lasting gratitude of thousands in a suffering world, not to speak of the healing leaves which he loved to pluck and to give from the Tree of Life :—" Can you not stoop down, wash like Naaman, and come out clean, —come out a king ?"

A farther point we may notice is, *the gratitude of the restored warrior*. If he had been influenced by any remains of a spirit of selfishness and domineering pride, he would at once, after obtaining the cure, have given orders to his charioteer to evade the dwelling at Gilgal, and drive, by the nearest road, back towards Syria. 'The Prophet,' he might have said, 'refused to grant me a personal audience. I need not now hold myself his debtor. I felt slighted by his not according me the homage to which, from my position, I was entitled — sending merely one of his servants with an oral message. I shall have my retaliation now for his discourtesy. Besides, why need I linger in this land of the Hebrews ? I have got what I wanted. Why tarry to perform a mere piece

of formal civility? After all, there may be no miracle in the matter. It may be some peculiar sanitary virtue in these Jordan waters which required neither seer nor priest to impart.' And so, he might have hastened to his Damascus home, to bow once more in the Temple of Rimmon, and forget all he owed to Jehovah and His Prophet.

Nay. He went back to the man of God "clothed with humility;" to lay at his door the tribute of a grateful heart, and to make one of the noblest confessions a once blinded idolater ever uttered.

May we not learn from Naaman's example, the simple but oft-forgotten lesson, how grateful and becoming is the remembrance and acknowledgment of kindness. Nothing is baser or more unworthy than to requite good deeds and loving labours—it may even be generous friendships, with coldness, rudeness, indifference, neglect. How often in this selfish world are those to be found, who have not a smile of thankfulness nor a word of gratitude for boons conferred;—heartless, pulseless, loveless beings, who grasp and take all they can get, as matters of course; proving, it may even be, at the

end, like the frigid serpent of the fable, which stung the warm hand of the benefactor whose pity had reanimated it ; or, like the ten lepers of gospel story, whom our blessed Lord healed, but only one of whom returned to tender thanks for deliverance. By all truly magnanimous souls, acts of goodness and beneficence can never be ignored or forgotten. Look at David's gratitude for the many proofs of Jonathan's kindness, after that generous heart had long ceased to beat. How he loved the limping cripple Mephibosheth for the sake of his friend, and gave the daily substantial evidence of these uncanceled obligations, by having a seat reserved for the orphan youth at the royal table ! Or look at a later example in the same beautiful life—David's, royal gratitude in the hour of returning prosperity and triumph ;—an hour when such debts are often, by ignoble natures, apt to be forgotten. Barzillai, a brave old chieftain from the glens of Gilead, came to meet the restored sovereign nigh the very spot where Naaman now was, in order to offer his congratulations, and see the King of Judah safely across Jordan. He had come, not long before, with timely succour and

refreshment, when, in a season of humiliation and disaster, the son of Jesse was a fugitive from his throne and palace. The moment of ovation has not dimmed the memory of these seasonable gifts, and the still more seasonable sympathy of the benefactor. To this Patriarch Sheikh is also offered a special place at the royal board, and a heart-welcome to the royal dwelling in Jerusalem. Barzillai pled exemption, on account of his years, from the distinguished honour; but the king would not allow him to depart till he had imprinted on his furrowed cheek the kiss of grateful affection—"And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place" (2 Sam. xix. 39). Nor did death itself extinguish these memories. In his last testamentary words, the names of Barzillai's children were commended, in sacred legacy, to the gratitude and love of his successor (1 Kings ii. 7). Or, to do no more than simply refer to a New Testament illustration—listen to the prayer and benediction of one of the noblest hearts that ever beat in a human bosom—"The Lord give mercy

to the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain. . . . The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day" (2 Tim. i. 16, 18).

To the Great Almoner of blessings, alike temporal and spiritual, are we as thankful as we should be? After some special token of providential goodness to ourselves or our households: when the Almighty Disposer in His infinite mercy, disappoints our fears and with gracious deliverances crowns our fondest hopes and prayers: when, for example, raised up from protracted sickness, during which, the hope of restoration was faintly cherished, and the shadows of death appeared to be gathered ominously around:—as the result of His restoring mercies, have the chariot-wheels always returned to the door of the Lord God of Elisha with tributary gifts of acknowledgment;—whether these be in the shape of material thank-offerings poured into His treasury—or the better and more acceptable sacrifices of a purer, diviner life-consecration,—we, as grateful recipients, exclaiming—
“The living, the living, even he shall praise Thee, as I do this day!” “Thy vows are upon me, O

God, I will render praises unto Thee?" Or rather, while the prayer has been heard and strength is restored, has the recorded vow of the sick-bed been forgotten, and the reproof too truthfully merited—"O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away" (Hosea vi. 4). The Christian's whole life, in the present world, may well be an anthem of gratitude; and its twofold theme will be prolonged and perpetuated in the Church above: for the Redeemed in heaven are represented as still employed in singing "the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb,"—the song of Providence and the song of Grace (Rev. xv. 3). Yes: however feeble and stinted it may be here, the believer's gratitude will then rise to its true and noble proportions, as, in the fulness of the divine vision and fruition, it contemplates the height and the depth, the length and the breadth of the love of God in Christ!

Finally, let us deduce from the passage a new illustration of *individual influence*—"And he

returned, he and all his company, and came and stood before him." Unless Naaman had reconsidered his resolution, retraced his steps to Jordan, and washed in its waters, his "company"—his retainers—could not have been spectators of the miraculous cure. They would have gone back to Syria, like himself, bigoted idolaters as they came. But having witnessed the immersion and its supernatural results, they gladly accompanied him to the house of the Prophet, to join in the tribute of thanksgiving.

Is it a bold or unwarranted supposition, that the captain of that company was not the only one then and there brought to confess that there was no true God save the God of Israel? Is it not more than probable, that some of these heathen attendants had been led, in consequence of their master's restoration, to a similar acknowledgment,—that they returned to their land, all of them profoundly impressed with the might of the Hebrew Jehovah—a few, it may be, resolved to bow in the Temple of Rimmon no more, but to exchange the impure and licentious rights of Astarte and Baal, for the simple

worship of the God who dwelleth between the Cherubim?

How often do we find that those, like Naaman, as he is now pictured to us anew standing at the door of Elisha;—or like penitent sinners resorting to a Greater,—come not alone? They come “with a company.” A minister of God, himself baptized with a fresh baptism of the Spirit, is personally raised and transfigured into a higher and diviner life: but his people—it may be a great congregation—are led to share also in the new consecration. A godly master, who has earned the appellation alike by precept and exalted character, brings his workmen to know of better than worldly wages, and to embark in their daily toil under the sway of loftier principles. A parent, by exemplary piety, consistency of conduct, singleness of motive, integrity of life, is made instrumental in securing as the name of his household “*Jehovah Shammai*”—“*The Lord is there;*”—training and preparing the family on earth to become one family in heaven. A godly officer—one of the Naamans of modern times—who has himself fought the good fight of faith and laid

hold on eternal life, has sounded in camp and barrack a better than martial bugle-note ; numbers, alike among rank and file, rally responsive to the summons, and a higher victory and purer kingdom is won ! We dare not, however, forget the solemn converse. There is an ungodly as well as a godly influence. There are ungodly masters sowing profligacy and infidelity among their workmen. There are ungodly parents, traitors to an immortal trust, neglectful of the best interests of those committed to them ;—by their own mournful aberrations, deflecting their children's footsteps from the path of duty and the ways of God. There are ungodly pastors, not heeding to feed their flocks with understanding and the fear of the Lord ; either keeping back the saving truths of the gospel, or setting up a low standard of piety ;—preaching smooth things : the trumpet gives forth an uncertain sound, and the slumbering multitude intrusted to their care, are unprepared for the battle. The picture of the rich man in the parable is surely one of the most impressive in sacred story. His own misery seemed to be nothing, compared with the consciousness of the evil in-

fluence he had exercised on others ;—the dread of having involved those of his own flesh and blood, who would naturally be moulded by his example, in his own guilt and doom,—“I pray thee, therefore, Father, that Thou wouldest send him to my father’s house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment ” (Luke xvi. 27, 28).

But let us not close with words or pictures of terror. Let the eye rather fall, once more, on the restored and regenerated Syrian, hastening with a new song on his lips across the plain of Jericho. Let us listen to old Jordan as it murmurs along, uttering, through the sacramental scene just witnessed on its banks, the great New Testament truth, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” In Naaman we have a living epistle—a glorious Old Testament attestation to the power of God and the grace of His gospel. In one who, as the leader of their hereditary foe, had shed the blood of Israel and bowed in the temple of an obnoxious idol, we have an encouraging assurance that no adverse position, no untoward circum-

stances, can keep us back from the healing waters. No previous sin—no previously erroneous “religious views”—can disqualify us from seeking and obtaining salvation. Let us only, like him, be brought to renounce all personal claim and title to the exercise of a mercy and grace whose glory it is to be free;—leaving nature’s laden chariot behind us, and listening to the beautiful words of the great Hebrew seer and preacher of a subsequent age—words which still ring in undying echoes, as they speak of unbought and unpurchasable blessings flowing from better than all earthly streams :—“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money : come ye, buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price” (Isaiah lv. 1.)

IX.

Consecration.

“AND HE SAID, BEHOLD, NOW I KNOW THAT THERE IS NO GOD IN ALL THE EARTH, BUT IN ISRAEL; NOW THEREFORE, I PRAY THEE, TAKE A BLESSING OF THY SERVANT. BUT HE SAID, AS THE LORD LIVETH, BEFORE WHOM I STAND, I WILL RECEIVE NONE. AND HE URGED HIM TO TAKE IT; BUT HE REFUSED. AND NAAMAN SAID, SHALL THERE NOT THEN, I PRAY THEE, BE GIVEN TO THY SERVANT TWO MULES' BURDEN OF EARTH? FOR THY SERVANT WILL HENCEFORTH OFFER NEITHER BURNT-OFFERING NOR SACRIFICE UNTO OTHER GODS, BUT UNTO THE LORD.”—2 KINGS V. 15-17.

Consecration.

No longer, as before, does NAAMAN, in unsubdued pride of spirit, remain seated in his chariot at the door of Elisha. With every trace of his disease obliterated,—his recently loathsome flesh and skin changed into that of a little child, he stands in the presence of his benefactor, calling himself “thy servant ;” and surrounded with his retainers, gives utterance to the sentiments of a full and jubilant heart. If, on the former occasion, the lesson on his conduct was this, “God resisteth the proud ;” we are called now to see how “He giveth grace unto the humble.” The alabaster box is broken, and the fragrance of the soul’s best ointment ascends to God and man. As we see him already bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, we are reminded of the inspired metaphor—“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season”

(Ps. i. 2). While doubtless he would consider that a debt of deepest obligation was due personally to the Prophet, it is equally evident that he recognised in the man of God, only the delegate and envoy of a Greater. Behind the direction of the human agent, "Go, wash in Jordan," he listened to "Thus saith the Lord." The feelings of his heart and of the hour, were they interpreted, could not be more appropriately expressed than in the opening strain of the later 'Anodus-song' of the children of the captivity, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good : for His mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy. . . . He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and break their bands in sunder. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men !" (Ps. cvii. 1, 2, 14, 15.)

Let us note these two points, as they are here brought before us in succession—Naaman's avowal of his faith, and the expression of his gratitude.

I. *His confession of faith*—"And he said, Be-

hold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel." This was no ordinary acknowledgment, when we remember by whom it was made. It was a confession, moreover, not whispered confidentially into the ear of the Prophet of Israel, but made, boldly and unblushingly, in the presence of his own heathen servants. Well might the warrior dread the consequences, on his return to Syria, of the adoption of an alien creed. It would, in all probability, compromise his position at Damascus. It might draw down upon him the displeasure of Benhadad, and alienate the goodwill of princes and nobles. Would he not be regarded as a traitor to his country,—a wretched apostate from the faith of his ancestors, who had publicly dishonoured the tutelary divinities of the nation? His life might be the penalty of perversion. But he has counted the cost, and is prepared to abide by his resolution. Nor, observe, is it a mere temporary renunciation of his pagan creed, or a nominal adhesion to that of the Hebrews. He has resolved to renounce idol-worship for ever; — "Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but

unto the Lord." He may forfeit, in the eye of his countrymen, his illustrious name and reputation. He may be no more "honourable" with his master. He may be subjected to misrepresentation, contumely, and scorn. He may, and doubtless will, feel himself in that most trying of positions, where he has to fight the battle and breast the current alone. But how can he dare forget or abjure the Great Jehovah of Israel, who had "answered him, and set him in a large place"—the Almighty Being to whom he owes his life? What are the honours which a grateful people may have conferred,—what the value of the jewelled emblems which glitter on his breast, compared with all that has been bestowed by Him whom he has been taught to regard and revere as "King of kings and Lord of lords." "From henceforth," says St Paul, "let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal. vi. 17) : words in which he may probably allude to the infirmity of defective vision from which he had suffered, ever since his eyes were blinded by the blaze of the Shekinah glory on the way to Damascus; as if Christ—his new Master—had from that

hour 'marked,' or "*branded*" him, as his slave and servant. So could Naaman—though in an opposite sense—say, regarding his purified physical frame, freed from the degradation-marks of suffering and misery. When he thought of the living servitude, temporal and spiritual, from which he had been mercifully delivered, he might well adopt the votive words of an older saint, "O Lord, truly I am Thy slave; I am Thy slave, Thou hast loosed my bonds" (Ps. cxvi. 16). 'Gentile and idolater as I once was, Thou hast marked me as Thine own. And shall I dare now pusillanimously to deny Thee? After such indubitable proofs of Thy power and mercy, shall I go back a fettered spiritual captive, to offer, with a debauched and demoralised conscience, a hypocritical sacrifice to a senseless idol?' No; at all risks, he casts in his lot with the true children of Abraham. He avows, as Ruth did to Naomi, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me" (Ruth i. 16, 17). He returns to Damascus, determined to re-enter on the faithful discharge of his martial duties: laying his

sword, as before, at the feet of Benhadad : rendering to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, but equally resolved to render to the true God the things that are His. Great, might and would be, the trial of his faith and constancy, when his solitary altar was set up in the midst of a city wholly given to idolatry, and, when thousands were doing homage at the great festivals of Rimmon, to find his voice alone silent amid the festal throngs. But he will prove "a mighty man of valour" in fighting these, as well as other and far different battles. He resolves, "Whatsoever others do, as for me, I will serve the Lord." In the case of an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, the divine promise is to be fulfilled—"And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's ; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob ; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel" (Isa. xliv. 4, 5).

What a rebuke to many, who, from pusillanimous motives, or from unworthy reasons of carnal expediency, shrink from making a bold and decided

avowal before the world, of loyalty and allegiance to their heavenly King, the Saviour who died for them. Assuredly, if Naaman had been swayed and victimised by that severest of all temptations—the dread of human censure,—he would have returned to Damascus idolater as he had left it; buried all the memories of Gilgal and Jordan in ungrateful oblivion, and burned incense, as aforetime, before the shrine of Rimmon. But God has not given to him “the spirit of fear, but of power” (2 Tim. i. 7). He cannot so degrade and humiliate himself at the bar of his own conscience, as to return to his native city with a lie in his right hand. He could not distrust the evidence of his own senses. Jehovah had wrought in his behalf, alike for soul and body, what all the sorcerers and magicians, all the conjurors and necromancers, all the pharmacopeia of Damascus had failed to accomplish; and he resolves to return, a missionary and propagandist of the new faith. For so doing, he may forfeit office and influence, name and fame. He may no longer lead the troops of Syria out to battle and victory: the garlands that wreath his brow may be removed, and given

to some subaltern, staunch in his fidelity to the traditional faith of his country—ready to defend alike her hearths and altars. But he rises superior to these, and such like possibilities of national dishonour and humiliation awaiting him. As his chariot is turned from the land of Israel towards the Syrian metropolis, he could say, in the words of a later spiritual hero, “Wherefore, we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. xii. 28).

Reader! go and do likewise. Let the example of a brave Gentile soldier nerve you to range yourself openly under the standard of the Great Captain of your salvation, and manfully to make the avowal before the world—“I serve the Lord Christ.” We know well (especially in the case of the young) the taunt and obloquy which such an avowal may often involve. Peculiarity of position and circumstance may render it no easy matter, in the name of your God, to set up your banners. The weapon with which Satan has defied—aye, too, and discomfited multitudes, is the weapon of ridicule; we are not ignorant of his devices. But He

that is for you, is greater than all that be against you. Resolve to adhere to the maintenance of Christian principle, undeterred by sneer and frown, contumely and reproach. Trust God, and He will disarm all difficulties and cover your head in the day of battle—out of weakness making you strong, enabling you to wax valiant in fight, and to turn to flight the armies of the aliens. Thus letting “your light,” (not the light of sectarian rivalry, or intemperate bigotry, or offensive parade of goodness and godliness; but the light of a religious profession and creed endorsed and countersigned by a pure, holy, consistent life)—letting such a light “shine before men,” others will “see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

II. Let us pass now to consider, *the expression of Naaman's gratitude.*

Note his gratitude to the human agent. It was not the mere thank-offering of the lip. He desires the Prophet to receive some substantial proof of his heart-sincerity. From these bags of gold and silver, and changes of raiment, which loaded mule

and camel in his cavalcade, he says, "Take a blessing of thy servant." But Elisha, doubtless courteously, but peremptorily, refused the proffered boon—"As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none; and he urged him to take it, but he refused."

What were the Prophet's reasons for this refusal? They were probably twofold.

(1.) He wished that God should have all the glory of the leper's cure. Had he assented to the proposal, and received the gift, it might have led to the inference that he arrogated some of the honour of the miracle to himself,—that it was the arts of priestcraft, some mystic charm in the directions he had given, which had made the ablution effectual. Elisha would have Naaman to know that he was the mere earthly vessel,—the instrument in the hand of a Mightier, by whom the stricken chief now stood in perfect soundness in the presence of them all. His language, as he repudiates the offered benefaction is,—Not unto me, not unto me, but unto the God I serve, give glory for His mercy and for His truth's sake!

(2.) Had he accepted the present, it might have

damaged and compromised, in distant Syria, his own character as Jehovah's Prophet. Not without semblance of justice, he might have been charged with some mercenary, interested motive, when he volunteered the message to the King of Samaria—"Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." When the warrior had gone back to Damascus, and his servants had told how costly a memorial and recompense had been left at the seer's dwelling, a hundred tongues might have been ready to denounce the covetous spirit of the Hebrew magician and wonder-worker;—the old taunt might have been launched on the lowly occupant of the dwelling at Gilgal, that in his vaunting communication to the King of Samaria to send the leper to him without delay, he was only desirous to make a gain of godliness.

We may learn from this Old Testament story what a noble thing it is, and specially living under the light and responsibilities of a better dispensation, to manifest an unselfish spirit; ready, if need be, to surrender personal good and worldly interests for the sake of Christ; to forego aught that might,

indirectly, tend to have the cause, dearer than life and substance, misjudged in the eyes of others. Paul's was a noble resolve; and the apostolic maxim in this, and other things, should shape our principles of action—"I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" (1 Cor. viii. 13).

But not only does Naaman wish to give a token of his gratitude to Elisha; he is anxious also, by an external action, to testify the deeper and more sacred obligations under which he is laid to Elisha's God. He accordingly requests permission of the Prophet, to carry with him, back to Damascus, two loads of earth; evidently to be utilised and consecrated for some religious purpose—"And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." We are led to pause and inquire, what was the object more particularly contemplated in this singular request.

(1.) We recognise in it, his desire to render

obedience to the will of Jehovah. There was a special divine injunction given to the Israelites, that their altars should be constructed of *earth*—"An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me" (Exod. xx. 24). It is not a little remarkable, that the command in that same passage is followed up by the promise—"In all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." Who knows but that Naaman, now standing within the walls of a school of the Prophets, may have been informed of this very promise made by the Lord he had avouched to be his God?—that if he reared in heathen Damascus his altar of earth, and there recorded Jehovah's name, that faithful God of all the families of mankind, would fulfil *His* part of the covenanted assurance; and make it one of the "all places" where He would come and bestow His blessing. As that promise was given strictly in connection with the "altar of earth," when the little mound of Palestine soil was shaped or enshrined for its destined purpose by the grateful Syrian, he could point to it and say, as he invoked the divine benediction, "Remember the word unto Thy ser-

vant upon which Thou hast caused me to hope” (Ps. cxix. 49).

(2.) Another reason for the petition doubtless was, that, as a Gentile proselyte, he wished to carry with him to his own home, some permanent memorial of his visit to the country of the Hebrews, and of the wondrous cure effected on him by the Hebrews’ God. It is evident this feeling must have mingled in his request; for if he had merely desired to obtain a portion of earth from the territories of Israel, sufficient for the construction of an altar, what need was there of carrying it the whole distance from Gilgal? Why not wait till he and his troop had crossed the hills of Ephraim and Naphtali, and then have laden the mules with their burden? But not only must it be Israelitish soil, it must be from the very scene of the restoration, to make it a significant memento of the miraculous healing. It would thus be, *First*, a perpetual remembrance to Naaman himself, of his vows and obligations. He had now publicly renounced idolatry: Rimmon and all his idols he had utterly forsworn. But the restored chief knew (as who does not?) the fickleness of the

human spirit. His heart was now thrilling with emotion, warm with the memory of his recent cure. But the hour might come when these memories would not be so vivid, when, dimmed by time and distance, he might be basely tempted to abjure his adopted faith and rejoin the multitude in their adoration of the national idol. If ever seduced to such perjury, the Earthen Altar, strangely unique amid other Syrian shrines of porphyry and marble, would read a rebuke to his faithlessness. It would remain a perpetual protest against idolatry. Every glance at that heap of alien mould would remind him—"Thy vows are upon me, O God." *Add to this*;—the very earth of which the altar was constructed, would be a keepsake of the land to which he owed so much;—a hallowed remembrance of the scene around the willows and palm-groves of Gilgal. There is a wondrous charm which Romanism has perverted for its own uses, but the spell of which lies deep in our emotional natures, in the possessing and treasuring memorials of sacred scenes and sacred spots. We speak not of a spurious veneration for those paltry relics which superstition often has

enshrined in gold and silver caskets, and before which she burns her incense and waves her censers,—such as the bones and dust of real or imaginary saints. But who ever gazed, without interest and emotion, on bark cut from the old olives in Gethsemane, or pebbles from the shores of Tiberias, or flint and agate from the rocks around Bethlehem and the Kedron? Nor need we go for holy scenes and associations so far as to the land of Palestine. Who does not value and garner the leaves gathered from the grave of buried love? Who does not cherish the Bible, on whose flyleaf parental affection has put the imperishable inscription, when perhaps the hand that traced it is mouldering in the tomb? Who does not treasure the pilgrim-staff on which some hoary grandsire leaned, or the chair on which venerable age gave forth lessons which time cannot obliterate?

It was with kindred feelings Naaman carried

* *Calmet* cites one among many instances of the children of Abraham taking pleasure in the stones and favouring the dust of Zion, mentioned by Benjamin of Tudela, that "the Jews of Nahardea, in Persia, built their synagogue with earth and stones fetched entirely from Jerusalem."

away his two burdens of earth. He doubtless desired to retain, in sacred remembrance, that never-to-be-forgotten scene at Jordan and Gilgal. If there was no art to pourtray the actual landscape, here was a simple, but most impressive and significant method of fixing its memories in his heart. In the courtyard, or kiösk, of his palace,—or it may be in the very hall, whose marble pavement, in the torture of his disease, he was wont in former years to pace—there, in the scene of his misery and despair, he rears this monument of faith and gratitude; and when his own dust mingled with that of other illustrious dead in the sepulchres of Syria, and perhaps no living voice in his household would be raised for the glory of Israel's God; here would be an enduring monument and manifesto of the faith of the old hero; he, being dead, would, in his dumb altar, still speak!

Who can tell, moreover (while thus incidentally referring to Naaman's death and burial-place), but that a portion of the "two mules' burden" may have been specially reserved or appropriated for his funeral obsequies. We know how eagerly the soil of "holy places" has been, and is still, prized

by orientals in connection with sites and places of sepulture. We have heard how the Hindoo values, above all spices and ointments, the vessel filled with the reputedly sacred water of the Ganges, to be placed by his dead body, and afterwards by his tomb. We know with what fondness, for the same purpose, the Hadji pilgrims carry in the folds of their green turbans, or next their bosoms, a few grains of earth gathered at Mecca. We know the story which has given to Europe the most interesting (we are tempted to add, after personally visiting it), the most magnificent, of all her graveyards; how the Pisans, in the Middle Ages, brought, on the occasion of their invading Palestine, shiploads of soil from a spot overlooking Jerusalem; and among these "burdens of earth" the most distinguished of her citizens and patricians eagerly sought the honour of interment. We know how the Jew, when poverty or age prevent him travelling back to the vale of Jehoshaphat,—the Valley of tombs,—appreciates, as the most cherished equivalent, a handful of *débris* from the base of Zion's Temple; that in his lonely grave in a land of exile, he may, in the last long sleep, lay his head on the

consecrated soil. Who knows but some such motive may, at the time, have suggested itself to Naaman, in soliciting from the hands of the Prophet the strange boon we are considering ; that when he died, his own fond wish may have been fulfilled and gratified, to have his embalmed remains resting on a pillow of that earth, which his sumpter-mules bore from the scene of cure and conversion,—a singular, miniature "*Campo Santo*" amid the royal tombs of Damascus ?

Once more ; he erected this altar of Hebrew earth, possibly for the purpose of offering sacrifice. That once proud, self-righteous leper, had already, by his humility, offered one acceptable sacrifice—"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit." But during his present sojourn in the land of Israel, and in this brief interview with the Prophet, who can tell but that he may have been, partially at least, initiated into deeper mysteries. The offering of "cattle from a thousand hills," would probably be no strange thing to him in the ceremonial rites within the Temple of Rimmon. But in this new earth-altar there is the suggestion of "better sacrifices than these." Though even to an Israelite himself,

in his dim typical dispensation, the coming Redemption was obscurely revealed, may we not imagine that Naaman, along with the materials for his earthen shrine, carried with him into heathen Syria, the foreshadowings, at least, of the great oblation—"The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." In that same injunction in the book of Exodus to which reference has already been made, regarding the altar of earth, it is added—"Thou shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt-offerings and thy peace-offerings, thy sheep and thine oxen." When Naaman returned to Damascus, raised his lowly memorial, and the smoke ascended from his burnt-offering, the Lord God of Israel would smell a sweet savour. He would see, in the person of the offerer, a type of those Gentiles—monarchs and warriors and mighty men—who would yet cast their swords and shields, their crowns and sceptres, at the feet of Immanuel, and acknowledge Him as Lord over all : in accordance with that striking inscription, which, in the midst of Mohammedan bigotry gleams to this hour, in Greek characters, on the *façade* of the oldest and grandest temple in Damascus—"Thy kingdom, O

Christ, is an everlasting kingdom, and Thy dominion endureth throughout all generations." *

Let this remarkable passage in Naaman's history read a lesson to us all. Are there any, on whom may have recently been bestowed gifts and pledges of the divine goodness ; some special providential deliverances ; some peculiar tokens of spiritual blessing ? Go ! gather your burden of earth : take it with you to your dwelling ; erect, in the midst of your family, your altar of gratitude, and write upon it the indelible inscription—"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards

* "The great mosque of the Khalif Wâled, once the Christian cathedral of the city. It is extremely difficult to see, as no Christian foot is allowed to cross the threshold. . . . Of the outside, also, only a few fragments are visible, but these are beautiful ; through some gates one can see the noble cloistered quadrangle surrounded by Corinthian columns and an exquisite fountain in Saracenic style in the centre : the gates themselves are of brass of very good workmanship, still bearing the figure of the sacramental chalice, now placed amid Arabic inscriptions, the additions of later years. The head of John the Baptist is believed to be still in existence in the crypt of the church."—*Syrian Shrines*, vol. i. p. 315. "For nearly three centuries Christianity was predominant in Damascus. Its metropolitan was present at the Council of Nice with seven of his suffragans."—*Porter's "Syria and Palestine."*

me." We know not what may have been the results of Naaman's piety in his Damascus home. The symbol of his faith and love (his earthen altar), may have been handed down, as a precious heirloom and keepsake, from generation to generation ; his children's children may have gazed on it, and loved to rehearse to one another the story of their great ancestor's disease and cure. Let the Christian remember this ; that the altar he erects,—in other words, the piety of a holy, God-fearing consistent life,—does not die with him : his example descends, as the noblest of heritages, to his offspring. Nor, be it added, does anything so tend to hallow and consecrate the earthly home, as the erection of a Domestic sanctuary, where morning and evening "the voice of rejoicing and of salvation" is heard. Sad are those dwellings "unwhitened by prayer,"—unblest with the incense-cloud ; on whose doors the entry is inscribed, "No altar here." Where shall we go to gather example and reproof for such prayerless homes ? Shall it be among the dwellings and tabernacles of Israel ? or in following the footsteps of prophets and apostles ? Shall we enter the abodes of primitive

believers,—the Simeons and Annas, the Marys, and Lydias of gospel times? No; we travel in imagination to witness a martial procession toiling along one of the steep and narrow gorges of ancient Palestine. In the rear of the imposing caravan, two mules are seen groaning under a strange earthen burden. It is a heathen of a dim and unprivileged age, bearing away materials for a domestic altar whereon he may serve the true God, and around which he may gather his household.

Who will dare plead the cares of family or the strain and stress of business, or worldly opposition after this? Naaman had the responsibility of the Syrian armies and the weight of government on his shoulders; yet he had time to erect his home-sanctuary and offer his daily sacrifice. Thousands of pagan eyes may have flashed displeasure upon him; but the moral hero fought a braver than his earthly battles, and has left a nobler than champion's epitaph inscribed on his tomb. He began his journey a leper and a heathen: he washed in Jordan, and was cleansed: he returned home, and reared his altar. Beautiful type and delineation of the true Christian. He begins his pilgrimage a

“miserable sinner.” He washes in the stream of salvation, and is cleansed. His “heap of witness” is erected;—the vow of allegiance and love is publicly recorded and devoutly observed. And when his journey is finished,—when he reaches his true home in the skies, his nobler indestructible altar of gratitude and love is upreared with the inscription—“THANKS BE UNTO GOD FOR HIS UNSPEAKABLE GIFT !”

X.

Scruples of the New Proselyte.

"IN THIS THING THE LORD PARDON THY SERVANT, THAT WHEN MY MASTER GOETH INTO THE HOUSE OF RIMMON TO WORSHIP THERE, AND HE LEANETH ON MY HAND, AND I BOW MYSELF IN THE HOUSE OF RIMMON: WHEN I BOW DOWN MYSELF IN THE HOUSE OF RIMMON, THE LORD PARDON THY SERVANT IN THIS THING."—2 KINGS V. 18.

Scruples of the New Proselyte.

WE left Naaman, in the preceding chapter, all joy. It was with him the flush of a new spring-time, alike in bodily and spiritual being. The torpor of winter and death had given place to the gleaming of green woods, the release of ice-bound rivulets, the song of gladsome warblers as they hailed the return of grove, and flower, and sunshine—"Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land" (Sol. Song ii. 11, 12). Elastic with this resurrection of life and hope, and with a heart overflowing with gratitude, he stood at the door of Elisha, and made the bold avowal of his faith in Israel's God.

But these spring-tides of feeling have their ebbs as well as their flows. In our highest moments of inspiration we are soon reminded that the struggle-

hour is at hand. Transfiguration-scenes and experiences are temporary and exceptional. "In the world" is the normal condition of the human spirit. How to bear itself amid secular and often unholy contacts, and amid base, mean, and sinful compliances, that is the stern problem which by the best must be faced and mastered. Naaman's thoughts begin to travel back from the banks of the Jordan and the Prophet's dwelling, to his distant home. Soon must he mingle once more in the crowd and din of the heathen city;—soon must he be back again at court, to resume the onerous duties of his station, as General of the Syrian hosts. His feelings and position were very similar to those, which from time to time the Christian, under a new and better dispensation, experiences in coming from the holy ordinance of the Supper, where his thank-offering has been presented, and his eucharistic sacrifice and vow have been made and recorded. Emerging from the sacramental waters with thoughts full of recent pledges and memorials of God's love, he knows that the hum of the old Damascus world must ere long burst upon him. The memories of Gilgal and the

Jordan must be superseded by sterner realities, amid the duties and cares and temptations of life. Happy are those who, in such circumstances, though they have left Mount Gilgal, have taken the earth with them for their life-altar of gratitude and thanksgiving ; saying, in the spirit of the old patriarch of Bethel, as he awoke from his desert-dream and poured the anointing oil on " the heap of witness "—" Then shall the Lord be my God ; and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house " (Gen. xxviii. 21, 22).

There might well have been, in the case of Naaman, *many* causes of anxious foreboding in the prospect of resuming his court and camp duties. But the picture presented to us in these verses is true to nature and experience, when, by some momentary and accidental association of ideas, *one* peculiar thought or anticipation dominates all others, and keeps for the time exclusive possession of the soul. The feeling or suggestion which now flashes across the mind of the cured warrior rankles like an arrow in his bosom, disturbing the peace of the present hour. With a child-like spirit he makes known the cause of perplexity

to Elisha, and solicits his advice. Let us state what it is.

He remembers that his royal master Benhadad is still an idolater; that at particular times he was in the habit of repairing, for purposes of worship and high festival, to the Temple of Rimmon.* Moreover, that it was part of his own official duty, as commander-in-chief, to accompany the king—a duty, the non-performance of which would entail the resignation of the seals and sword of office. The warrior has that confidence in Benhadad's magnanimity and liberality of spirit, as to feel assured that he will not, on account of a change of religion, degrade a tried and trusted officer of his household from his rank and official position. He will still continue him general of his troops as heretofore.

* "Selden supposes that Rimmon is from the Hebrew root *ram* 'to be high,' and signifies 'most high.' . . . Movers regards Rimmon as the abbreviated form of Hadad-Rimmon, Hadad being the sun-god of the Syrians. Combining this with the pomegranate, which was his symbol, Hadad-Rimmon would then be the sun-god of the late summer, who ripens the pomegranate and other fruits, and after infusing into them his productive power, dies, and is mourned with the 'mourning of Hadad-Rimmon in the Valley of Megiddon' (Zech. xii. 11)." — *Smith's Dic.*, Art. "*Rimmon*." See also *Keil on "Kings,"* vol. i. p. 386.

But what will be Naaman's own duty with regard to that heathen temple? Will he not compromise his character, as a proselyte and worshipper of the true Jehovah, by setting his foot across its threshold?—dare he venture with impunity—dare he, without dishonouring the great Name he has sworn to venerate, venture to join the heathen procession? Nay more. Benhadad, on entering the temple and approaching the idol, was in the habit of leaning on Naaman's arm. When the king bowed or prostrated himself, his lord-in-waiting was obliged, in appearance, to bow also. Even this semblance of homage to the Baal of Syria disturbs his sensitive conscience. Yet how can he manage to evade the duty? We repeat, he seems not to doubt or question that his master will grant him (to use a modern phrase) the fullest toleration in his creed. He would concede to him a dispensation from "religious disabilities," from which others dared not plead exemption; but he would not be so ready to release him from official attendance at this temple ceremony. Would it be lawful, would it be expedient to go, with the royal arm locked in his:—

could he, as the king's adjutant, perform this state duty without being identified as a worshipper? The troubled chief resolves to unbosom his scruples to the Prophet Elisha. "When my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing."

Let us pause for a moment in passing, and mark—

(1.) Naaman's *sincerity and candour*. He does not muffle his feelings. If he had been like many, he would have dissembled his doubts, concealed his difficulties, waited till he reached Damascus, and then solved them as best he could, by some questionable compromise between principle and expediency. He might have said, 'What is the use of injuring myself in the eyes of this Prophet,—risking his reproof and indignation. I shall put the key in the wards of my heart, and keep that scruple imprisoned there.' No; the cause of perplexity is out at once. He makes a clean breast of it, and solicits advice. His eye was single; he had a

simple, honest desire to know his Lord's will, and knowing it, to *do* it.

Then (2.) mark his *sensitive conscience*. He had no thought of worshipping Rimmon. The old Syrian deity holding the symbolic pomegranate, was from that hour a senseless idol. It was the mere posture, the semblance of adoration—no more, which caused him these scruples. But the very appearance of countenancing an idolatrous rite aggrieved his conscience. Was not the crossing of that threshold doubtful? Would it not seem in the eyes of his fellows—of his soldiers—of his king, as if he were indifferent to the honour and glory of the true God? He may possibly (and he might imagine so himself) be over-fastidious on this subtle question of casuistry; but unless he had it resolved on the authority of God's Prophet, it would sorely disturb his homeward journey. His sunny dreams of Jordan and Gilgal would be haunted and scared with visions of Rimmon's Temple; and of himself, with broken vows on his head, doing obeisance at the idol shrine. He resolves to take this case of perplexity to the seer of Israel.

Would that we had more of such tenderness of conscience, in business, in the world, in the everyday relations of life ;—that we more honoured and revered Conscience as God's own vicegerent, feeling that in fighting against the sacred monitor, and disowning the responses of the divine oracle, we are fighting against *Him* !

(3.) Note Naaman's *faith*—his determination, at all hazards, to cleave to Jehovah. For there is every reason to infer, that if the Prophet had given a negative to his request,—pronounced the accompanying his master to Rimmon's Temple to be incompatible with his religious duty, he would have acted on his decision: he would have been willing to renounce pay and place—surrendered all he had, rather than dishonour that holy name, and give occasion to Jehovah's enemies to blaspheme. And noble evidence it is of strength of faith and integrity of purpose, when in critical circumstances, and in those special emergencies when conscientious scruple stands confronted face to face with worldly and professional interests, we are willing to take God's word and to abide by it, even though duty demands the renunciation of mate-

rial good—the taking up of the cross—denying ourselves earthly honour and advantage. We shall be no losers at last—"Them that honour me," says God, "I will honour." It may be, like the tempest-tost on Tiberias, to steer our way through boisterous wind and buffeting waves. But if it be at His bidding, He who "constrained His disciples to get into the ship" (Matt. xiv. 22) will bring us, sooner or later, to the haven where we would be.

And how does Elisha reply to the question of the proselyte? Naaman, perhaps, would expect—and perhaps we expect, to hear the Prophet's denunciation of the proposal. We look for a response in the spirit and words of the old Tishbite,—“How long halt ye between two opinions : if the Lord be God, follow Him ; but if Baal, then follow him.” Are we not ready to picture the frown of stern indignation on the brow of the man of God, and to imagine him exclaiming, ‘It cannot be ! By thus identifying yourself with heathen abominations you would only draw down afresh the vengeance of Heaven. The leprosy now washed away in the Jordan would again cleave unto you

for ever, and you would go forth anew from the idol's temple, a leper white as snow. Dream not thus of dishonouring your vows,—of attempting to serve God and Rimmon. Go, tell Benhadad, that rather than mock the Jehovah whom you have covenanted to serve, you will consent to be degraded to the most menial drudgery ; that the keys and sword of office will readily be surrendered, before you darken the portals of the sun-god.'

This, however, is not his answer. He does not indeed say, ' You *may* bow : your conscience is too tender, you are unnecessarily sensitive and scrupulous.' He leaves it still with him an open question ; and without pronouncing any final or authoritative deliverance, he gives the simple benediction, " Go in peace." Elisha knew he could place reliance on the recent convert. He could trust his new strength of purpose, his principle, his sincerity. He knew well the trials of faith to which he would be subjected on his return to Damascus—the envenomed darts that would likely be hurled upon him by those who would have no sympathy with his alien creed. If he had, by a withering negative, at once forbidden the banns, and declared, ' Bow in Rimmon's

Temple you dare not, even in semblance,' he might have greatly and unnecessarily perplexed him, in this the first hour of his spiritual experience. But he knew that "to the upright there would arise light in darkness" (Ps. cxii. 4)—that the day would come when the anxious inquirer would have his difficulties satisfactorily solved. Meanwhile, therefore, he says, "Go in peace;" 'I know my God will go with you. He will guide you aright. He will give His angels charge concerning you, to keep you up in all your ways. I know you will never be guilty of dishonouring Him in the eyes of the heathen. He who hath delivered thy soul from death, will He not deliver thine eyes from tears, and thy feet from falling?' In the words of an excellent writer, "he knew that it was not good to put 'old wine into new bottles,' and to load the tender feelings of the weak disciple with duties most painful and difficult even to the strongest, or to expose him to the most trying of all opposition, the sneers and sarcasms of his companions. Elisha foresaw that the time would come, when . . . the seed so lately sown, and now scarcely in the blade, would

become the strong and powerful tree, and he was content to wait for this. He therefore treated the tender plant with gentleness." *

Let us not, however, mistake the Prophet's deliverance. Let us not construe it into a formal sanction of doubtful expediency or worldly conformity. Many there are, who would willingly enlist this passage on their side, to draw such a conclusion,—who would make it their authority for conforming with some questionable—and more than questionable—maxims and practices. They would willingly retain their religious profession—the outward semblance of fealty to God and His righteousness, and yet claim the sanction to go and bow in some Rimmon-Temple.

The Bible is always consistent ; and there can be nothing in this isolated passage, contradictory to its manifold other express sayings and injunctions. God demands the whole heart ; He will be satisfied with nothing short of it ; and when any competing object comes between it and Him, that object must be removed. "No man," is the utterance of the Great Teacher Himself, "can

* *Blunt.*

serve two masters." "He that is not with me is against me." "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." "Let us therefore," says the apostle, "go forth to Him, without the camp, bearing His reproach." Is Naaman, then, to be made an exception to all this? Is he encouraged by the Prophet of Gilgal to act on different principles; to serve two masters; to offer allegiance alike to God and to Baal? No; it is obvious there was no such sanction given, thus to serve Jehovah in the land of Israel and Rimmon in the land of Syria. This would have been one of the most pernicious of modern dogmas, that all creeds and beliefs are the same. Neither did the convert shrink from confessing the true God before his fellows. He was ready to brave all, and, if need be, to lose all. His confession we have already listened to: it was that of no lip votary, no hypocritical dissembler, no spiritual coward, whispered in a corner: he made it publicly, in presence of all his heathen servants. He had nothing to be ashamed of. Taking with him in his cavalcade the two burdens of earth, to form a public

altar, was not the deed of a man wishful to evade the light and to hide his religion under a bushel. Elisha, knowing that he was dealing with an earnest soul, one who wished really to glorify the true Jehovah, tells him to proceed on his journey in "peace,"—that the Gracious Being he had avouched to be his God would teach him in His own good time a more excellent way. If Naaman's had been a poor, miserable, half-hearted belief and profession—a compound of his ancestral and adopted faith, the Prophet might have required to meet his query with a strong prohibition. But he seems to say, 'I know, that as a learner in the school of truth, you will be instructed aright. In your case the promise will be fulfilled—"The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will He teach His way?" (Ps. xxv. 9). "Then shall ye know if ye follow on to know the Lord."'

It is the same, or a similar question to that of Naaman, which is often addressed still, and especially by those who are young in the life of faith, to their religious teachers and guides—'Can I, as a Christian, venture where pleasure and taste, and it may be companionship which it were hard

to renounce, would all lead me—to places of fashionable, some would say, frivolous amusement ?' Again, 'Can I accept that post of advancement, or continue in it, without being suspected of selfish, calculating, carnal motives, or without being tempted to a dereliction of principle ?' Again, 'Can I continue in that social circle, or prosecute that secular calling, without lowering my standard, compromising character, and dishonouring God ?'

We pronounce, at present, no verdict on these hypothetical cases, and especially on the lawfulness or unlawfulness of this or that worldly amusement. On the one hand, there may be, and there is with many, a morbid and unhealthy shrinking from the acceptance of much happiness in this beautiful earth of which God has made the human heart receptive—the "all things" He has given us "richly to enjoy"—what regales the ear and delights the eye, and refines and elevates the taste. On the other hand, it is equally certain there are manifold resorts, pleasing and pleasurable, and some of them apparently innocuous, repairing to which may be like treading the edge of a volcano,—threatening their frequenters with con-

tinual risk of being scathed with the fire. But if, in such "cases of conscience" we were dealing (as Elisha knew he was dealing), with a sensitive, honest, upright, God-fearing individual, who really wished to know the path of duty and to be divinely guided, we would say with the Prophet, "Go in peace." Do not involve yourself in needless perplexities. Your difficulties will in due time be solved and your path made plain. If you can utter the prayerful desire to the Heavenly Light—"Lead *Thou* me on!"—"Teach me the way wherein I should walk; I lift up my soul unto Thee;"—then, frequent these amusements so long as the dictates of your new and better nature accord a sanction. If such resorts run counter to your spiritual advancement—if they hinder and impede your heavenly walk, and interfere with the love and allegiance you owe to Christ as your divine Lord and Master, you will soon come to discard them. You will soon have them superseded by different tastes, new likings and preferences. You will soon cease to find satisfying enjoyment in what are counterfeits of the true. You will soon discover that there is no honey to be extracted from

such "untrue rocks"—no living water to be drawn from such leaky, broken cisterns. You will soon serve yourself heir to nobler aspirations and purer enjoyments. When you enter that temple of Rimmon, and witness the senseless and sinful rites, you will turn away with averted face. Your own enlightened judgment will teach you, as possibly it taught Naaman, that the two are incompatible. As you lean on your Master's arm and bow, conscience will make a coward of you. It will whisper, 'As a spiritual Israelite, as a leal-hearted Christian, you are out of your place here.' "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"' (1 John ii. 16).

We may learn, too, from Naaman's question and Elisha's reply, that our conduct—what an apostle calls "our walk and conversation"—will be moulded and regulated according to the state of the heart with God. If the heart be right, all will come right. The stirred pool may take a while to settle into its normal state of clearness and quiescence—there may, for a time, be dulled and distorted images on its ruffled surface, but

soon it will become like a calm mirror, reflecting truth, purity, and righteousness.

How different from Naaman were many of the characters with whom our Saviour came in contact in the New Testament! How different were His dealings with Pharisees whose hearts were *not* right! In the external observances of the law they were scrupulously correct. They tithed their anise, mint, and cummin; they made broad their phylacteries; they whitewashed persistently the sepulchres of the prophets; they were punctilious in creed and rubric; they would not speak to a Samaritan; they would not for a moment bow in a Rimmon temple;—if they came within sight of it, they would shake the dust off their feet. But they devoured widows' houses; they oppressed the poor; they despised justice, judgment, and mercy. They were quick enough to discern the mote in their brother's eye; they discerned not the beam in their own. Incarnate Truth, Purity, and Justice, could not say to such, "Go in peace." He could pronounce nothing but impending woe and judgment: His withering words of condemnation were unsparing, uncompromising,

sharper than any two-edged sword. On the other hand, see how tenderly He dealt with sensitive consciences. Nicodemus, who came by night seeking instruction in the kingdom of God ; or the weeping penitent, who crouched at His feet, bedewing them with tears. He did not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. He tempered the wind to the shorn lamb, and laid no trial or temptation on His people heavier than they were able to bear.

The subject, indeed, of this chapter, is one on which it becomes us to speak with extreme caution. Let none gather from it the impression, that they can follow Naaman's example—leave duty an "open question," and enter with impunity the great Rimmon-Temple of the world. True, Daniel could remain unscathed in heathen Babylon. There were saints in Nero's household ; and many a brave young Christian has done noble battle with the irreligious influences among which his lot has been cast. But, to revert to the same beacon and warning selected for example in a former chapter ;—"Remember Lot's wife"—remember Lot's family. See what contact with the irreligious and

godless did ! See the result of entering the gates of Sodom—tampering with a world lying in wickedness—trying to serve God and Mammon. There is—there can be, no blast of the silver trumpet, “Go in peace,” sounded in the ear of such ;—“There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” Remember the twofold apostolic motto and watch-word,—the warrant for liberty and the warning against license—“Use the world,” (that is the sanction for liberty ; in lawful enjoyment of all earthly good—for stretching our sails on its summer seas and basking under its summer skies) ; “without abusing it,” (that is the monitory warning-bell from rock or lighthouse, when these seas are treacherous, and when, unknown, we may be gliding over the unseen reef). Keep off debatable ground. Keep clear of positions and situations where your faith is likely to be imperilled. Beware of living what has been called a “border life ;” hovering on the confines of the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. It is the irresolute of the army who are the first to break and flee ; whereas the thinnest ‘red line,’ if staunch and valorous, can stand the charge. Remember,

many there are who enter the world unvisited by Naaman's scruples, who have none of Naaman's dislike for its base and sordid compliances. For such to enter Rimmon's Temple is to court certain ruin. These God addresses in language of unqualified prohibition—"What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness, and what concord hath Christ with Belial, or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor. vi. 14, 15, 17).

God's own gracious benediction is, "Go in peace." And if, from peculiar circumstances, you may be led at times into difficult and perplexing paths—your footsteps perhaps trembling on the threshold of some questionable or forbidden resort, seek to hear His voice alone, and be prepared to follow the summons—"This is the way, walk ye in it." Looking up to Him who has promised to "keep in perfect peace" the mind that is stayed on Him, and that trusteth in Him (Isa. xxvi. 3), be this your prayer—"Unto Thee, O Lord, do I

lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in Thee : let me not be ashamed ; let not mine enemies triumph over me. Yea, let none that wait on Thee be ashamed ; let them be ashamed which transgress without cause. Show me Thy ways, O Lord ; teach me Thy paths. . . . All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep His covenant and His testimonies " (Ps. xxv. 1-4, 10). Thus shall "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

XI.

A Voice of Warning.

“ BUT GEHAZI, THE SERVANT OF ELISHA THE MAN OF GOD, SAID, BEHOLD, MY MASTER HATH SPARED NAAMAN THIS SYRIAN, IN NOT RECEIVING AT HIS HANDS THAT WHICH HE BROUGHT ; BUT, AS THE LORD LIVETH, I WILL RUN AFTER HIM, AND TAKE SOMEWHAT OF HIM. SO GEHAZI FOLLOWED AFTER NAAMAN : AND WHEN NAAMAN SAW HIM RUNNING AFTER HIM, HE LIGHTED DOWN FROM THE CHARIOT TO MEET HIM, AND SAID, IS ALL WELL ? AND HE SAID, ALL IS WELL. MY MASTER HATH SENT ME, SAYING, BEHOLD, EVEN NOW THERE BE COME TO ME FROM MOUNT EPHRAIM TWO YOUNG MEN OF THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS : GIVE THEM, I PRAY THEE, A TALENT OF SILVER, AND TWO CHANGES OF GARMENTS. AND NAAMAN SAID, BE CONTENT, TAKE TWO TALENTS. AND HE URGED HIM, AND BOUND TWO TALENTS OF SILVER IN TWO BAGS, WITH TWO CHANGES OF GARMENTS, AND LAID THEM UPON TWO OF HIS SERVANTS : AND THEY BARE THEM BEFORE HIM. AND WHEN HE CAME TO THE TOWER, HE TOOK THEM FROM THEIR HAND, AND BESTOWED THEM IN THE HOUSE ; AND HE LET THE MEN GO, AND THEY DEPARTED. BUT HE WENT IN, AND STOOD BEFORE HIS MASTER : AND ELISHA SAID UNTO HIM, WHENCE COMEST THOU, GEHAZI ? AND HE SAID, THY SERVANT WENT NO WHITHER. AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, WENT NOT MINE HEART WITH THEE, WHEN THE MAN TURNED AGAIN FROM HIS CHARIOT TO MEET THEE ? IS IT A TIME TO RECEIVE MONEY, AND TO RECEIVE GARMENTS, AND OLIVEYARDS AND VINEYARDS, AND SHEEP AND OXEN, AND MEN-SERVANTS AND MAID-SERVANTS ? THE LEPROSY THEREFORE OF NAAMAN SHALL CLEAVE UNTO THEE, AND UNTO THY SEED FOR EVER. AND HE WENT OUT FROM HIS PRESENCE A LEPER AS WHITE AS SNOW.”—2 KINGS V. 20-27.

A Voice of Warning.

IN the opening sentences of last chapter, we compared the new life, natural and spiritual, infused into the restored warrior, to the resuscitation of the earth, when, coming forth from her "winter dormitory," she assumes her robes of spring, and all outer Nature, with its song-burst and flower-burst, participates in a common joy. In the verses, however, which are now to occupy our thoughts, that vernal sky is suddenly overcast; and we have to watch an unexpected cloud passing athwart the landscape. We seem almost to wish that the touching story of the Aramite general, so complete and unique in itself up to this point, had closed here without any supplementary incident—that the curtain had fallen as the Syrian caravan begins to move on its homeward way, and the good Prophet has poured his benediction on the head of its chief.

Yet, too, ever and anon, with divine wisdom,

does the Bible in its inspired narratives, by some qualifying statements—some sombre touches in its pictures, keep before us the memories and evidences of “a present evil world,” and of the spirit that still “ruleth in the children of disobedience.” Amid its notes of sweetest music, there steal, as if at measured intervals, strains of disharmony and dissonance, to remind us that the heart—yes, even the heart that has been moulded and disciplined by godly and godlike influences, is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jer. xvii. 9). We are mostly accustomed, doubtless, in pacing the sacred sculpture-gallery, to contemplate its moral heroes;—elevated characters, who present us with a lofty ideal of the saintly and spiritual life. But, intermingled here and there, as if to impart value by contrast, we have specimens also of the depraved, the demoralised, the “devilish,”—those who seem haunted and victimised by degraded vice and demon passion—“lewd fellows of the baser sort,” who have “given themselves over to a reprobate mind,” and broken loose alike from the restraints of conscience and the laws of God. Such is the iron

visage, on its gloomy pedestal, we are called on now to confront amid his nobler compeers. The case of GEHAZI is one of not a few, which unfolds to us what the human spirit would be, were it uncurbed and uncontrolled by restraining grace. It utters one of the many monitory voices heard from the gates of Eden onwards—"When thou thinkest thou standest, take heed lest thou fall." If the topics suggested in our preceding chapters have been mainly profitable for our "instruction in righteousness," this closing one embraces more especially lessons of "rebuke and correction." While in Naaman, we have had a favourable representative of character (moulded by divine influences) occupying a high social position; we have had in the little captive maid, as well as in the warrior's own camp-servants, equally favourable specimens of those in the opposite pole of the social system. Beautiful and attractive, indeed, up to this point, is the picture of the mutual relation subsisting between master and servants. But in Gehazi—the new study which arrests our attention, we have, alas! as sad an illustration as could well be furnished, whether in

truth or fiction, of an unprincipled and untrustworthy dependant—one who confirmed to no one requirement in the triple code of the kingly-philosopher—neither “doing justly, nor loving mercy, nor walking humbly with God.” If Abraham’s steward, old Eliezer of *Damascus*, as a faithful, conscientious servant, had left still a fragrant name and memory in the city of his birth, not perhaps unknown to Naaman;—here was another, a child of Abraham, a steward also in a holy household, but all unworthy of his pedigree—a withered branch of the stock of Israel, dishonouring the parent stem, “twice dead, plucked up by the roots;”—and who, in the same ancient capital, could hardly fail to have his own terrible memorial in all time to come, as having served himself hapless heir to the leprosy of the great Syrian soldier.

The story, so familiar in itself, may be briefly recapitulated.

Naaman had, with a full heart, taken leave of the Prophet; and, perhaps, if there were one memory in that farewell more deeply impressed on the soul of the grateful warrior than another, as he commenced wending up the steep defile to


Ai and Bethel, it was the magnanimity of the man of God in positively refusing aught of recompense or reward. He had done his duty, and glorified his heavenly Master in the eye of a Gentile stranger. He asked no more, and would take no more, than was included in this sublime consciousness. But if the seer of Gilgal, in the simplicity of his nature and the strength of high principle, was willing thus to forfeit the chance of so rich a booty, there was one who saw at a glance that, by a bold stroke—a skilful, unscrupulous artifice, he might outwit his superior, and realise the dream of a covetous youth. These festal garments (caftans and abbâys), and these bags of silver, are not everyday chances of plunder. What is to hinder seizing the glittering prize? Their possession will emancipate him from a position of dependence and penury, and secure him an ample competency for life. His resolution is taken. Either with a blasphemous imitation of Elisha's divine watchword, or, as others have surmised, uttering the *wallah*,* the vulgar ruffian-oath on the lips of foul-mouthed Arabs to this day, he

* See Art. *Elisha*, in Smith's Dic.

thus pursues his guilty soliloquy—"Behold, my master hath spared Naaman, this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought; but as the Lord liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him."

There is no time to be lost. Down he steals from the wooded height, unobserved, as he thought, by the unsuspecting Prophet. With fleet foot he follows the caravan. Naaman at once perceives and recognises him. We are struck with the incidental touch of courtesy in the highborn Syrian: (is it not one of the first-fruits of his newborn nature? the first sacrifice of the humble spirit?) It was but a few hours before, when, in his pride, he scorned to descend from his chariot at the door of Elisha; now he leaps down from it to receive his benefactor's dependant! He had been possibly impressed, during his brief stay at Gilgal, with the devotion and sincerity of these sons of the prophets, of whom Gehazi was one; and he offers this expression of respect, alike for their own sake and for the sake of their venerable head. "Is it well?" is the brief question with which he accosts the young messenger who now

draws breath at the side of his chariot:—"Is it well?" he asks with anxiety, for he is fearful that some sudden disaster had in the meantime overtaken the man of God. With imperturbable composure, the response is ready and given—"All is well." But the hot haste demands explanation; and this, too, is volunteered in the shape of an ingenious lie, so readily improvised, that we think it abundantly proves the utterer to be already an adept in that form of guilt. The fabrication was this: that two young men from the prophetic school on Mount Ephraim, had unexpectedly arrived at his master's house with a tale of impoverishment and want. To relieve the necessities of these two imaginary students, the sordid petitioner solicits, in Elisha's name, some of the treasure which had been so lately declined. Naaman, with no thought of imposition, is only too willing to manifest his gratitude. In accordance with the words addressed to a Gentile of a later age, and one in spirit not unlike himself, he takes the bread intended for the true children, and casts it to dogs (Matt. xv. 26). In the generosity of his nature, he insists on doubling the talent



of silver, making it equivalent to £700 of our money.* Not only so, but two Syrian servants are told off to convey the goodly gift in safety. When they had reached a tower, or "swell"—some hiding-place near the Prophet's dwelling—the nefarious treasure is artfully secreted by Gehazi, and the Syrian bearers are quietly dismissed; for the cunning and politic finishing-touch is added in the narrative—"He let the men go, and they departed." To all appearance this first part of the plot has succeeded to perfection. Not only is the spoil secured, but, better than all, the archplotter flatters himself he has quietly got rid of the only witnesses who could criminate him, and that he has successfully eluded Elisha's detection. With brazen face, unabashed effrontery, "he went in," we read, "and stood before his master." The Prophet, in common with noble natures, was himself open, generous, ingenuous, transparent; never, probably, would he have dreamed of such possibilities of baseness. But the divine voice which had on other occasions whispered in his ear more joyful communications,

* *Blunt and Keil.*

had apprised him of the present meanness and treachery. Indignant that truth, and the God of truth, should be thus wantonly insulted and compromised, yet without any of the vehemence of resentment which the deed and moment, we might think, would have justified,—he puts the question to the dissembler, “Whence comest thou, Gehazi?” Gehazi was, however, still equal to the occasion; and to face the suddenness of the query, another lie is ready as an auxiliary to its predecessor—“Thy servant went no whither.” His injured master in a moment denounces and exposes the tissue of deceit so artfully weaved. He tells the false-hearted delinquent and knave, how, with penetrating glance, he had read his inmost thoughts and tracked his guilty footsteps—“Went not mine heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?” The scoundrel’s mouth is closed; the withering words fall like a flash of scathing lightning upon him—“The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever!” What a change! The culprit had entered the familiar door revelling in the success of his iniquity—

the future gleaming with visions of ease, luxury, and independence. In a moment the mirage is dissolved. Through the same portals he goes forth as if smitten by an avenging angel,—like another Cain with the brand of infamy upon him, —“a leper as white as snow.” Truly, says the Preacher, “The getting of treasures by a lying tongue, is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death” (Prov. xxi. 6).

Let us endeavour to gather a few of the lessons with which this final scene in the narrative is replete.

Let us note *the danger of unimproved and abused spiritual privileges*. Gehazi's religious advantages, in all probability, began at a date anterior to the time and mission of Elisha. One tradition speaks of him as the boy who sped at the bidding of the Tishbite to the top of Carmel, to watch the rising of the expected cloud over the Mediterranean, precursive of the longed-for rain. This, at all events, we know, that seven years previous to Naaman's pilgrimage, he was the witness of Elisha's greatest miracle, when he brought

back the Shunammite's son to life. Doubtless, during these intermediate years, he had seen many other signs and wonders authenticating his master's divine call. He had mingled with the youths—his own contemporaries and fellow-students—in the college of the prophets: and, above all, in common with them, and more than them, he had been the privileged eye-witness of the pure, exalted character and consistent walk of his honoured superior. He might well have had his own life moulded by the silent influence of so bright and godlike an example. Is it too much to imagine, that in their solitary journeys from village to village, traversing frequently the whole extent of the Holy Land from Carmel to the Jordan, they had oftentimes sung together the same Psalm, and united in the same prayer;—that words of holy counsel were ever and anon dropped from the lips of the sage into the ears of his younger attendant? Something of the feeling which, in an older generation, Eli cherished for the child Samuel; or the later feeling which Paul cherished for his son Timothy, must this foster-father have entertained for the companion of his

varied labours. The good seer may possibly have even hoped that the mantle of true prophetic succession, which had dropped on his own shoulders from the hands of Elijah, would be transferred to this "son in the faith," when his time also arrived to be gathered to his fathers. But, like Judas under a greater and diviner Master, the disciple of Elisha becomes a renegade and traitor in the midst of rarest privilege. And alike awfully sudden and humiliating is his fall. We cannot believe that such a concatenation of crime was a mere *impromptu* act, the result of unpremeditated impulse;—as if some spirit from the abyss had its first grapple with a hitherto pure and holy soul, and carried it by one fierce assault. We suspect, as has already been indicated, the adder must have been for long nestling and nurturing in his bosom—biding its time. The process of heart-hardening had been, it may be slowly and imperceptibly, but too surely progressing. What we shall immediately find was his master-passion, gathered to its aid others that became willing accomplices and abettors. All unknown to the trustful Prophet, he had probably

become restive and ill at ease under his life of enforced poverty, devotion, and self-denial; and when the tempting prize is within reach, and the guilty resolve is taken, he scruples at no means to compass his end. Who could for a moment have dreamt, that that privileged attendant of the holiest man of his age, was carrying, under an assumed guise, a demon's depravity, such as would have been spurned and repudiated by the lowliest camel-driver in Naaman's retinue.

Alas! however, such is a mournful fact—that no fall is so low and so fearful as the fall of a man “once enlightened,” and who has “tasted of the heavenly gift.” No recoil to sin is so terrible as the recoil on the part of one who has “tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come.” None is so rapidly and mournfully demoralised as the Prodigal who has gone to the far country resolved to stifle early conviction, to be oblivious of mother's prayers, and father's counsels, and summons of Sabbath bell. O saddest of all catastrophies, when “the end of those things is *death!*” The same sun which, in the case of a healthy though leafless tree, evokes by its warm-

ing beams latent life, when it shines on the foetid pool or stagnant pond only elicits and diffuses corruption. The religious training and pious fellowship which softens and ameliorates the docile, teachable heart; if abused and rejected, will only serve to stir up the natural, innate tendencies of evil. Mournful experience testifies, that it is not familiarity with divine themes, nor intercourse with devout persons, which can insure a holy walk and consecrated life. On the contrary, unless God's grace be vouchsafed and superadded, a man may, like Gehazi, be slumbering at the foot of a Bethel-ladder traversed with angels and musical with heavenly voices, and yet be dreaming and scheming baseness, villany, and fraud,—his mouth full of cursing and bitterness—the way of peace unknown; ready at any moment when the temptation comes, to rush "against the thick bosses" of the Almighty's "bucklers." Indeed, this intimate familiarity with spiritual matters, unless watchfully guarded, may have a tendency rather to diminish their effect on life and practice; engendering unconcern—culminating, it may even be, in cheerless unbelief. It has been well said, that

if the gravedigger—constantly surrounded with mementos of dissolution—is liable (just *because* habituated to the spectacle), to be least of all men impressed with the lessons of the grave, the uncertainties of life, the certainty of death, and the grandeur of immortality;—it is the spiritually privileged—those breathing a holy atmosphere, and moving in the circle of holy influences, who have greatest need to cherish remembrance of the apostolic watchword, “By the grace of God I am what I am.” Those who have all these outer surroundings of pious home and Christian training—faithful preaching and holy sacrament—temple-work and temple-life—who have stood, like Gehazi, at triumphant deathbeds, and watched departing souls, borne in the chariots of salvation, singing the hymns of Paradise—may have most need to prefer as their habitual prayer, “Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.” “And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. *But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out*” (Matt. viii. 11, 12).

Let us write “Beware” on our seasons of loftiest

privilege, and on our moments of highest inspiration. "Beware" of a spirit of indifference to divine things, harbouring aught that would blunt the fine edge of conscience, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God; allowing religion to become a weariness; outwardly professing godliness, while inwardly in league with the world, the flesh, and the devil. If the path of deterioration be once entered on, it is difficult to turn aside, or to retrace the upward way. How often those, who at first only allowed themselves a slight deflexion from duty, and who would, with a Hazael's scorn, resent the imputation of baser and fouler deeds, have gone on from weakness to weakness, till their bosoms have become a moral charnel-house—a hell of guilty passion, godless lust, and blank despair! One of the saddest, if not the saddest of Bible utterances is this, "Ephraim"—(the loved—the trusted—the privileged—the "dear Son"—God's "pleasant child")—"Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone!"

A second lesson we may learn from the story of Gehazi, is *the certainty of sin's detection*. It was

a boldly-conceived and a boldly-executed scheme of the audacious criminal. As with the prophet of Nineveh, when he embarked in the opportune vessel at the port of Joppa, just sailing for Tarshish, everything seemed to augur and insure him success : the unsuspecting natures of the two principals, Elisha and Naaman ; the long distance that would soon separate the warrior from the Prophet,—so that suspicion, even if roused, would lack confirmation : then the convenient hiding-place, where the ill-gotten treasure was stowed away, among these limestone crags and their tufted copse and herbage. The crafty plotter had nothing farther to do but to preserve his own look of guilelessness and innocence ; and the first favouring moment (in the absence of his master, or at dead of night, when the other occupants of the dwelling were asleep), he might transfer the booty to some place of greater safety ; disposing of the rich garments, in exchange for gold, to the first travelling caravan of merchants he would meet on the way to Philistia or Egypt, and investing the silver talents in the purchase of sheep and oxen, vineyard and oliveyard, in one of the fertile glens of Ephraim.

Yes, the luxurious, independent future is all pleasantly mapped out before him. He sees himself the owner of an estate; barns built, granaries stored, abundance laid up for many years; servants and slaves reaping his corn, pressing his grapes, and serving his table; his life, too, of abstemiousness and servility, and (perhaps, what was worse to him) of enforced sanctimoniousness, at an end.

Such were the air-castles which Gehazi, in common with thousands of accomplished graduates in crime, have reared for themselves. But he forgot, or tried at least to bury from remembrance, the truth which he had embodied in his own thoughtless imprecation, that "*Jehovah liveth*";—that there is an eye above, keener to detect than that of warrior or prophet;—that the true God of heaven has, employed in His service, retributive ministries swifter than the heathen's avenging furies, who dog the heels of crime, and do not allow the world to forget the old monition, "Be sure your sin will find you out." "If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me" (Ps. cxxxix. 8-10). It is true that sentence against an evil work is not always (indeed, is seldom) executed speedily. God many times seems to "keep silence"—to be like the Baal of Carmel, "asleep." The daring and presumptuous venture their own sceptic conclusions on this forbearance of the Most High, in thinking Him "altogether such an one as themselves"—"The Lord doth not see, neither doth the God of Jacob regard" (Ps. xciv. 7). If, however, there be in the present state, exceptions to this great retributive law in God's moral economy—if the theft, or lie, or deed of darkness perpetrated under cloud of night, escape detection, there is a day coming when every such Gehazi will be brought to stand naked in the presence of the Great Heart-Searcher, and the truth (it may be, wantonly uttered in oath in this world) become a stereotyped reality in the next—"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the *living* God." And as the detection will be sure, so also will the punishment be commensurate with the crime. In the case of Gehazi, most meet and befitting was the nature of the retribution.

He would rob the restored Commander of his festal garment; a white garment, too, he shall have in return, but very different truly from the one he has avariciously appropriated:—a garment of terrible import, which in a terrible sense shall “wax not old,” for it shall go down a frightful heirloom to his children’s children. It is a robe of leprosy, “white as snow.” “Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap!”

A third lesson we may draw from the narrative is, *the tendency of one sin to generate another*. When the moral sense becomes weakened, and moral restraints are withdrawn, the horde of demons gather strength;—the avalanche of depravity acquires bulk as well as velocity, in its downward course of havoc and ruin. “These wild beasts—the wolves of the soul—may hunt at first singly, but afterwards they go in packs, and the number increaseth the voraciousness thereof.” When the citadel of the heart is carried by assault, one bastion after another is dismantled, and its treasure abandoned to the enemy. The Reaper angels, in

the final harvest of wrath, are pictured as gathering, not single stalks, or even sheaves, but "*bundles* to be burnt."

Mark the sad experience of Gehazi :—

(1.) Note his *covetousness*. Avarice was the besetting sin of his nature—the prolific parent of all the others. He was among the last, indeed, who ought to have succumbed to it. What position, one might have thought, more favoured—more to be envied than his? It was angel-work, surely, that; to be the confidant and associate of Jehovah's greatest living prophet; away from the din and turmoil and sin of busy cities; free from the cares and anxieties of a coarse, secular calling—living in an atmosphere of holy and blissful seclusion: yet no unnatural, hermit life either; but alternating devotion and study with active work in his oft-journeyings to and from Carmel, along with him whose delight, like that of a Greater, seems to have been "going about doing good." What a school for faith, and love, and charity—the nurture of generous thought and philanthropic deed! But an enemy came and sowed tares in that promising field: the furrows too readily received the accursed

seed, and the crop of covetousness choked the better and nobler portion. For some pieces of silver and a few costly garments, he who might have been faithful to death as the loyal servant of the man of God, sold his honoured birthright, and stooped to a deed of unparalleled meanness. Come and read on the tomb of one whose name might otherwise have had its place on the roll of Hebrew worthies — “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him” (Isa. lvii. 17).

(2.) But the motive-power of covetousness roused into action other depraved, and, till now, slumbering forces. We have to note next, his *untruthfulness*. Isaac Watts’ child-hymn, in simplest child-language, expresses in brief the sad experience of this covetous attendant—

“For he who does one fault at first,
And lies to hide it, makes it two.”

In rushing after Naaman’s chariot, he accomplishes his robbery and pillage by means of a brazen falsehood—a plausible, ingenious story; and then, on returning with cool effrontery to the presence of his master, the unexpected questioning to which

he is subjected, only serves to elicit another denial—"Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" "Thy servant went no whither."

Among the diverse and multiform ranks of evil-doers in our fallen humanity, there are none more degraded and hopeless than those recruited by the *liar*. From most other sins there is ever the possibility of emancipation and recovery; but in the case of the traitor to truth, conscience gets debauched and demoralised, and the moral perceptions blunted. Add to this, the convicted soon awake to the discovery, that through their unreliable words and ways, their worldly reputation and character become irreparably injured and impaired. How scrupulously should we seek to "buy the truth, and to sell it not!" Under how many specious forms and counterfeits is the beauty and purity of this "pearl of character" disfigured, by the artful equivocation—the mental reservation—the tortuous policy—the disingenuous intrigue—the trick of trade—the gilded compliment—the fashionable apology—the polished evasion—the unmanly insinuation—the bold exaggeration! Ah, beautiful virgin Truth! when shall we see thee, arrayed in

thy pure white garments, lighting thy vestal fires in this treacherous, unreliable, overreaching world? There is a noble ring in thy voice which cannot be mistaken: truth of word, truth of character, transparency of conduct—"the true *life*." Among the many homilies needed, in a degenerate age, to be with trumpet-tongue proclaimed from press and pulpit, none is more urgent than that suggested by the Apostle's text—"Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour." God is emphatically the God of Truth—"A God of truth, and without iniquity; just and right is He." Gehazi—and not only Gehazi, but his children's children—"his seed for ever," would be a perpetual standing commentary in Israel of the Psalmist's denunciation—"Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak lying. The Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man" (Ps. v. 6).

(3.) Scarcely distinguishable from Gehazi's sin of falsehood—akin to it, and a part of it—(a sister-spirit of evil)—let us note still further, his *hypocrisy*. Bad enough and base enough was the nefarious lie; but the guilt of it was specially

aggravated by his pretending better things. Had he been a servant, untrained and untutored in higher duties — a rough mountaineer, got for mere manual drudgery and labour, to hew wood and draw water for the school at Gilgal ;—or had Elisha unwittingly enlisted in his household service, one of the moral waifs—the pests and scum of society, that doubtless haunted Judean towns and villages as they do our own—we could not have so wondered at his becoming the prey of sudden and great temptation, and even fencing round his bold sin by a bolder falsehood. But he was, as we have seen, for a long course of years, the trusted and disciplined attendant of the man of God,—with whom he had constantly mingled in religious and solemn duty, and borne the staff and mantle of the prophetic office ; nay, if we mistake not, himself one of the sons of the prophets—an aspirant to the sacred calling. He doubtless could not fail to be well known throughout all Israel. The calm and stately demeanour of the gentle Elisha could not be dissociated from the youth who travelled at his side, and sped on his errands of mercy. What a shock to this kind-hearted master, when,

all in a moment, his eyes were opened to the mean, sordid, grasping, lying ways of him who had given proof and promise of other and better things—who had abused his confidence, wounded his unsuspecting nature, compromised him in the sight of Naaman, done his best to brand him with having as keen an eye to his own interests as the most avaricious slave in heathen Syria, or the most mercenary, time-serving priest in Rimmon's Temple. This dissimulation in his case was double treason before high heaven. He was the Old Testament parallel,—the living counterpart, of the withered fig-tree on the road to Bethany, which received the awful doom from the lips of injured Truth,—not so much because it was a fruitless cumberer, as because it was a base pretender. If it had been content with the avowal of its barrenness—extending its bare stems like skeleton-arms in the midst of that fig-grove—it would, in all probability, have been passed without comment. But it mocked the eye of the spectator with deceitful foliage; appearing as if it had gratefully yielded to the influences of spring suns, and dews, and rains—an attractive rustling sheen, which hid no fruit behind.

The malediction falls upon it ; the blasted, withered leaves next day strew the turf of Olivet. The miracle stands forth in sacred story, the one solitary act of doom in a ministry of love—"Let no fruit henceforth grow upon thee for ever." . . . "How soon is the fig-tree withered away!" Significant picture of the hypocrite ;—the base alloy that would pass itself off for gold,—the false life that mimics and counterfeits the true ;—like the spasmodic movement of the arm in galvanism, or like the sprinkling of virgin snow that covers treacherous pit or festering corruption :—the man of saintly semblances, who, like Gehazi, utters his perjury—"sweareth to his own hurt," under the garb of religious pretension and sanctimonious profession—a wretched actor on the stage of unreality, who even makes these artificial disguises auxiliaries in accomplishing low intrigue, and base, worldly schemes. No sin so heinous as this. It has often been noted that our Divine Redeemer, in His discourses and sayings in the days of His flesh, had words of kindness, encouragement, and mercy to the very publicans and harlots—the lowest dregs of the

Jewish population. The veriest outcast from purity was suffered to kiss His feet, and bedew them with tears. The one class for whom He has nothing but withering words—on whom He discharges arrows of wrath, and judgment, and woe—are “pharisees! *hypocrites!*”

But we shall not close this series of meditations with so gloomy a theme as the stern lessons derived from the contemplation of a vicious and vitiated life. We shall rather take one parting glimpse at that cavalcade vanishing from sight amid the mountains of Ephraim, with the two strange burdens of earth borne in its midst;—the chief and his retainers, perchance, together waking the echoes of the valleys through which they pass with songs of grateful praise.

We might have wished to know the sequel of that singular history. It would have interested us to have had further described Naaman's return to the old capital—his entrance within ‘the Gate of God’—his meeting with his glad and wondering household—his tribute of special gratitude to the little Hebrew maid—the ministering

angel—in whose case later prophetic words had a remarkable fulfilment—"The feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them" (Zech. xii. 8)—the erection of the earth-altar, close, it may be, by the Abana, whose musical stream would now recall other and more hallowed river-memories. May we not even picture the rejoicing proselyte as High Priest in his own dwelling, gathering his family around the pile of consecrated dust, singing the new hymn of his adopted faith and trust—"God is the Lord, who hath showed us light. Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I will praise Thee; Thou art my God, I will exalt Thee. Oh, give thanks unto the Lord: for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever" (Ps. cxviii. 27-29).

On Naaman's future, however, the sacred narrative is silent; and it is not for us to attempt to lift the veil and indulge in conjecture. Doubtless he would come to know, that the new and higher life on which he had entered, purchases no exemption from struggle and conflict and fierce

temptation ;—that all who live godly must suffer persecution ;—that the altar, with its holy earth, would in itself be no charm against the corruptions of his own heart and the wiles of the Great Adversary ;—that though he had returned among the mountains of Lebanon no longer the blinded pagan he had left them, there were still in their midst, in a truer and more perilous than literal sense, “ lions’ dens and mountains of leopards.” Let us hope and believe that he lived and died another Daniel in Babylon ; maintaining a consistent and unsullied character ; against whom neither the votaries of Rimmon nor the courtiers of Benhadad could bring any weightier accusation than in the case of the other—“ We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God ” (Dan. vi. 5).

We can with greater confidence picture Naaman, now, “ on the other side Jordan ;” within the Gate of God, in “ the city which hath foundations ;” made “ more than conqueror ;”—his old name invested with a new celestial meaning—“ *beautified* with salvation ”—singing, in concert

with the multitude which no man can number, "the new song"—even the song of the crowned victors who have *washed* their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,—“Unto Him that loved us, and *washed us from our sins* in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever” (Rev. i. 5, 6). While, in the case of Gehazi, we have the toll of a warning bell beckoning us off the rocks in life’s treacherous sea; in him—who by better than any earthly title or earthly promotion was “Captain of the Lord’s host”—we have a bright beacon-light shining on the heavenly shore, and inviting us to cast anchor in the same sheltering haven. That great salvation—which, through the symbol of ablution in the waters of Israel, was so free to him—is equally free to us. There are chimes stealing down from the upper sanctuary, sounding in our ears the glorious invitation and welcome—“Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” The same benediction breathed upon him, is breathed upon us—a benediction proceeding from the lips of ONE mightier than Hebrew

seer, and who surrendered His own life that He might have a right to utter it—"Go IN PEACE!" "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth" (John xiv. 27).

As we began by quoting the quaint words which an old divine employs in commencing his volume on the same theme, so we cannot more appropriately conclude than by adopting his closing sentences, as a parting word to those who have accompanied us in the narration of this "story of grace"—"I do here reach out comfort, and say, '*Goe in peace.*' Though you and I shoul'd never hear the voice nor see the face of other, yet we do well, as long as the peace of God is with us. Nourish your heartes till death, in the love of the gspell. Make not shipwreck in the havens. Hold to your old Master, and be His servants for ever. To the worke of whose grace I commend you, which is able to sanctify you throughout, and both to keep your bodies, souls, and spirits pure and blameless to His coming."

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